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THE WATSONS

By
JANE AUSTEN



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BY EDITH
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TO
MY FATHER
JOHN HUBBACK.
TO REMIND HIM
OF THE TIME
WHEN WE WROTE
“ JANE AUSTEN’S SAILOR BROTHERS ”
TOGETHER

E.B.

PREFACE

I WILL not apologise. I like my great-aunt Jane, and she would have liked me. She would have said, "I am pleased with your notion, and expect much entertainment." Solemn people can say, if they like, that we should not do this, but I decline to be solemn about Aunt Jane. She was fun, much more than she was anything else, and this has been fun to do.

She meant to do it herself some day and told Cassandra all about it. After her death, Cassandra used to read *The Watsons* aloud to her nieces, and my grandmother, Mrs Hubback, was one of them. She was Catherine Austen then, the daughter of Frank, one of Jane's sailor brothers. She was born too late to know Jane, but was a favourite with Cassandra.

Years afterwards in 1850, my grandmother wrote down from memory the story of the Watsons, and continued it, probably as she had been told Jane meant to continue it, but I think she got tired of those lines, and the story did not suit the Victorian atmosphere. This novel she called *The Younger Sister*.

Some years ago I took charge of a number of old family books. One day, as I was dusting them, the first volume of *The Younger Sister* fell out of

the bookcase on to the floor, and lay there open, and as I knelt I read, and it was of Elizabeth Watson that I read. I carried the three volumes down to read them in peace by the fire. The first was Jane Austen through a haze of memory. Jane Austen incidents in the second. No connection with Jane Austen in the third. First to please ourselves, and secondly to please those who will be pleased, we have tried to disentangle Jane's story from that of her niece.

Some people say Jane never meant to finish *The Watsons*, and that the situation was beyond her scope. I entirely disagree. I think she had all the material to her hand. The story was there, and could only be continued in one way, and that way was barred for family reasons.

The Watsons begins with the assembly at D—— on "Tuesday the 13th of October." I believe that to have been the date on which she began to write it. She might have made it begin on an indefinite Tuesday, or on a certain date in October, if she had been writing at another time of year, but so fixed a date as Tuesday the 13th of October is almost certainly a real one. It was in 1807 that the 13th of October was a Tuesday. What was Jane doing and feeling then?

Two years earlier her father had died. Her mother, Cassandra and herself were living at Southampton with Frank Austen and his wife. Not so long ago she had passed through Dorking, in which the scene of *The Watsons* is laid. The year before she and her mother had paid an un-

expected visit to Stoneleigh, a very great house indeed, with a fine picture-gallery and a young heir. Here was material for Osborne Castle and its surroundings.

Why then was the novel left unfinished? I believe the reason was this. Jane was deeply devoted to her family, and quite aware that family life is a fine art. Her heroine, Emma Watson, was to lose her father and go to live with her brother and sister-in-law. But Jane had lost her father and gone to live with her brother and sister-in-law. Was it wise to write on that subject at that time? Think of the feelings involved! Again, was it possible? Those of us who have tried to write know the extraordinary difficulty of telling of anything deeply felt in the present. ..

“ ‘With this same key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,’ once more!
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!”

I think Jane put *The Watsons* away because it was too near her own life, but she did not abandon it, for there it was in her desk after her death.

Of the characters, Elizabeth Watson is my special joy. Her sister Emma is not so brilliant or endearing as some of Jane's heroines, but she is a very agreeable sensible young woman, and it is pleasant to follow her fortunes. Mr Watson is just enough like Mr Woodhouse to invite comparison, but Tom Musgrave has no parallel, and no rival. He began life in the “Letters of a young lady to her friend,” published in the volume *Love*

and Freindship, and was brought thence unchanged to fulfil his destiny in *The Watsons*. Perhaps one reason for Cassandra's love of the story was that it recalled the days when Jane was seventeen, "One of the best of ages."

Jane Auster's manuscript ends with Chapter X.

E. B.

THE WATSONS

CHAPTER I

THE first winter assembly in the town of D. in Surrey was to be held on Tuesday, October 13th, and it was generally expected to be a very good one. A long list of county families was confidently run over as sure of attending, and sanguine hopes were entertained that the Osbornes themselves would be there. The Edwards' invitation to the Watsons followed of course. The Edwards were people of fortune who lived in the town and kept their coach. The Watsons inhabited a village about three miles distant, were poor and had no close-carriage; and ever since there had been balls in the place, the former were accustomed to invite the latter to dress, dine, and sleep at their house on every monthly return throughout the winter. On the present occasion, as only two of Mr Watson's children were at home, and one was always necessary as companion to himself, for he was sickly and had lost his wife, one only could profit by the kindness of their friends. Miss Emma Watson, who was very recently returned to her family from the care of an aunt who had brought her up, was to make her first public appearance in the neighbour-

hood ; and her eldest sister, whose delight in a ball was not lessened by a ten years' enjoyment, had some merit in cheerfully undertaking to drive her and all her finery in the old chair to D. on the important morning.

As they splashed along the dirty lane Miss Watson thus instructed and cautioned her inexperienced sister :

"I dare say it will be a very good ball, and among so many officers you will hardly want partners. You will find Mrs Edwards' maid very willing to help you, and I would advise you to ask Mary Edwards' opinion if you are at all at a loss, for she has a very good taste. If Mr Edwards does not lose his money at cards, you will stay as late as you can wish for ; if he does, he will hurry you home perhaps—but you are sure of some comfortable soup. I hope you will be in good looks. I should not be surprised if you were to be thought one of the prettiest girls in the room, there is a great deal in novelty. Perhaps Tom Musgrave may take notice of you ; but I would advise you by all means not to give him any encouragement. He generally pays attention to every new girl, but he is a great flirt and never means anything serious."

"I think I have heard you speak of him before," said Emma ; "who is he ?"

"A young man of very good fortune, quite independent, and remarkably agreeable, an universal favourite wherever he goes. Most of the girls hereabouts are in love with him, or have been. I

believe I am' the only one among them that have escaped with a whole heart ; and yet I was the first he paid attention to when he came into this country six years ago ; and very great attention indeed did he pay me. Some people say that he has never seemed to like any girl so well since, though he is always behaving in a particular way to one or another."

"And how came *your* heart to be the only cold one ?" said Emma, smiling.

"There was a reason for that," replied Miss Watson, changing colour. "I have not been very well-used, Emma, among them ; I hope you will have better luck."

"Dear sister, I beg your pardon, if I have unthinkingly given you pain."

"When first we knew Tom Musgrave," continued Miss Watson without seeming to hear her, "I was very much attached to a young man of the name of Purvis, a particular friend of Robert's, who used to be with us a great deal. Everybody thought it would have been a match."

A sigh accompanied these words, which Emma respected in silence ; but her sister after a short pause went on :

"You will naturally ask why it did not take place, and why he is married to another woman, while I am still single. But you must ask him—not me—you must ask Penelope. Yes, Emma, Penelope was at the bottom of it all. She thinks everything fair for a husband. I trusted her ; she set him against me, with a view of gaining him herself, and it ended in his discontinuing his visits,

and soon after marrying somebody else. Penelope makes light of her conduct, but *I* think such treachery very bad. It has been the ruin of my happiness. I shall never love any man as I loved Purvis. I do not think Tom Musgrave should be named with him in the same day."

"You quite shock me by what you say of Penelope," said Emma. "Could a sister do such a thing? Rivalry, treachery between sisters! I shall be afraid of being acquainted with her. But I hope it was not so; appearances were against her."

"You do not know Penelope. There is nothing she would not do to get married. She would as good as tell you so herself. Do not trust her with any secrets of your own, take warning by me, do not trust her; she has her good qualities, but she has no faith, no honour, no scruples, if she can promote her own advantage. I wish with all my heart she was well-married. I declare I would rather have her well-married than myself."

"Than yourself! yes I can suppose so. A heart wounded like yours can have little inclination for matrimony."

"Not much indeed—but you know we must marry. I could do very well single for my own part; a little company, and a pleasant ball now and then, would be enough for me, if one could be young for ever; but my father cannot provide for us, and it is very bad to grow old and be poor and laughed at. I have lost Purvis, it is true; but very few people marry their first loves. I should not

refuse a man because he was not Purvis. Not that I can ever quite forgive Penelope."

Emma shook her head in acquiescence.

"Penelope, however, has had her troubles," continued Miss Watson. "She was sadly disappointed in Tom Musgrave, who afterwards transferred his attentions from me to her, and whom she was very fond of; but he never means anything serious, and when he had trifled with her long enough, he began to slight her for Margaret, and poor Penelope was very wretched. And since then, she has been trying to make some match at Chichester—she won't tell us with whom; but I believe it is a rich old Dr Harding, uncle to the friend she goes to see; and she has taken a vast deal of trouble about him and given up a great deal of time to no purpose as yet. When she went away the other day she said it should be the last time. I suppose you did not know what her particular business was at Chichester, nor guess at the object which could take her away from Stanton just as you were coming home after so many years' absence."

"No indeed, I had not the smallest suspicion of it. I considered her engagement to Mrs Shaw just at that time as very unfortunate for me. I had hoped to find all my sisters at home, to be able to make an immediate friend of each."

"I suspect the Doctor to have had an attack of the asthma, and that she was hurried away on that account. The Shaws are quite on her side—at least, I believe so; but she tells me nothing. She

professes to keep her own counsel ; she says, and truly enough, that ‘ Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ ”

“ I am sorry for her anxieties,” said Emma ; “ but I do not like her plans or her opinions. I shall be afraid of her. She must have too masculine and bold a temper. To be so bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation—is a sort of thing that shocks me ; I cannot understand it. Poverty is a great evil ; but to a woman of education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest. I would rather be teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a man I did not like.”

“ I would rather do anything than be teacher at a school,” said her sister. “ *I* have been at school, Emma, and know what a life they lead ; *you* never have. I should not like marrying a disagreeable man any more than yourself ; but I do not think there *are* many very disagreeable men ; I think I could like any good-humoured man with a comfortable income. I suppose my aunt brought you up to be rather refined.”

“ Indeed I do not know. My conduct must tell you how I have been brought up. I am no judge of it myself. I cannot compare my aunt’s method with any other person’s, because I know no other.”

“ But I can see in a great many things that you are very refined. I have observed it ever since you came home, and I am afraid it will not be for your happiness. Penelope will laugh at you very much.”

“ *That* will not be for my happiness, I am sure.

If my opinions are wrong, I must correct them; if they are above my situation, I must endeavour to conceal them. But I doubt whether ridicule—has Penelope much wit?"

"Yes; she has great spirits, and never cares what she says."

"Margaret is more gentle, I imagine?"

"Yes; especially in company; she is all gentleness and mildness when anybody is by. But she is a little fretful and perverse among ourselves. Poor creature! She is possessed with the notion of Tom Musgrave's being more seriously in love with her than he ever was with anybody else, and is always expecting him to come to the point. This is the second time within this twelvemonth that she has gone to spend a month with Robert and Jane on purpose to egg him on by her absence; but I am sure she is mistaken, and that he will no more follow her to Croydon now than he did last March. He will never marry unless he can marry somebody very great; Miss Osborne, perhaps, or somebody in that style."

"Your account of this Tom Musgrave, Elizabeth, gives me very little inclination for his acquaintance."

"You are afraid of him; I do not wonder at you."

"No, indeed; I dislike and despise him."

"Dislike and despise Tom Musgrave! No, *that* you never can. I defy you not to be delighted with him if he takes notice of you. I hope he will dance with you; and I dare say he will, unless the

Osbornes come with a large party, and then he will not speak to anybody else."

"He seems to have most engaging manners!" said Emma. "Well, we shall see how irresistible Mr Tom Musgrave and I find each other. I suppose I shall know him as soon as I enter the ball-room; he *must* carry some of his charm in his face."

"You will not find him in the ball-room, I can tell you; you will go early, that Mrs Edwards may get a good place by the fire, and he never comes till late; if the Osbornes are coming, he will wait in the passage and come in with them. I should like to look in upon you, Emma. If it was but a good day with my father, I would wrap myself up, and James should drive me over, as soon as I had made tea for him; and I should be with you by the time the dancing began."

"What! Would you come late at night in this chair?"

"To be sure I would. There, I said you were very refined; and *that's* an instance of it."

Emma for a moment made no answer. At last she said—

"I wish, Elizabeth, you had not made a point of my going to this ball; I wish you were going instead of me. Your pleasure would be greater than mine. I am a stranger here, and know nobody but the Edwards's; my enjoyment, therefore, must be very doubtful. Yours, among all your acquaintance, would be certain. It is not too late to change. Very little apology could be requisite to the Edwards, who must be more glad of your com-

pany than of mine, and I should most readily return to my father; and should not be at all afraid to drive this quiet old creature home. Your clothes I would undertake to find means of sending to you."

"My dearest Emma," cried Elizabeth warmly, "do you think I would do such a thing? Not for the universe! But I shall never forget your good-nature in proposing it. You must have a sweet temper indeed! I never met with anything like it! And would you really give up the ball that I might be able to go to it? Believe me, Emma, I am not so selfish, as that comes to. No, though I am nine years older than you are, I would not be the means of keeping you from being seen. You are very pretty, and it would be very hard that you should not have as fair a chance as we have all had to make your fortune. No, Emma, whoever stays at home this winter, it shan't be you. I am sure I should never have forgiven the person who kept me from a ball at nineteen."

Emma expressed her gratitude, and for a few minutes they jogged on in silence. Elizabeth first spoke:

"You will take notice who Mary Edwards dances with?"

"I will remember her partners if I can; but you know they will be all strangers to me."

"Only observe whether she dances with Captain Hunter more than once—I have my fears in that quarter. Not that her father or mother like officers; but if she does, you know, it is all over with poor

Sam. And I have promised to write him word who she dances with."

"Is Sam attached to Miss Edwards?"

"Did you not know *that*?"

"How should I know it? How should I know in Shropshire what is passing of that nature in Surrey? It is not likely that circumstances of such delicacy should have made any part of the scanty communication which passed between you and me for the last fourteen years."

"I wonder I never mentioned it when I wrote. Since you have been at home, I have been so busy with my poor father and our great wash that I have had no leisure to tell you anything; but, indeed, I concluded you knew it all. He has been very much in love with her these two years, and it is a great disappointment to him that he cannot always get away to our balls; but Mr Curtis won't often spare him, and just now it is a sickly time at Guildford."

"Do you suppose Miss Edwards inclined to like him?"

"I am afraid not: you know she is an only child, and will have at least ten thousand pounds."

"But still she may like our brother."

"Oh, no! The Edwards look much higher. Her father and mother would never consent to it. Sam is only a surgeon, you know. Sometimes I think she does like him. But Mary Edwards is rather prim and reserved; I do not always know what she would be at."

"Unless Sam feels on sure grounds with the lady

herself, it seems a pity to me that he should be encouraged to think of her at all."

"A young man must think of somebody," said Elizabeth, "and why should he not be as lucky as Robert, who has got a good wife and six thousand pounds?"

"We must not all expect to be individually lucky," replied Emma. "The luck of one member of a family is luck to all."

"Mine is all to come, I am sure," said Elizabeth, giving another sigh to the remembrance of Purvis. "I have been unlucky enough; and I cannot say much for you, as my aunt married again so foolishly. Well, you will have a good ball, I daresay. The next turning will bring us to the turnpike: you may see the church-tower over the hedge, and the White Hart is close by it. I shall long to know what you think of Tom Musgrave."

Such were the last audible sounds of Miss Watson's voice, before they passed through the turnpike-gate and entered on the pitching of the town, the jumbling and noise of which made further conversation most thoroughly undesirable. The old mare trotted heavily on, wanting no direction of the reins to take the right turning, and making only one blunder, in proposing to stop at the milliner's, before she drew up towards Mr Edwards' door. Mr Edwards lived in the best house in the street, and the best in the place, if Mr Tomlinson, the banker, might be indulged in calling his newly-erected house at the end of the town, with a shrubbery and sweep, in the country.

Mr Edwards' house was higher than most of its neighbours with four windows on each side of the door; the windows guarded by posts and chain, and the door approached by a flight of stone steps.

"Here we are," said Elizabeth, as the carriage ceased moving, "safely arrived, and by the market clock we have been only five-and-thirty minutes coming; which I think is doing pretty well, though it would be nothing for Penelope. Is not it a nice town? The Edwards have a noble house, you see, and they live quite in style. The door will be opened by a man in livery with a powdered head, I can tell you."

CHAPTER II

EMMA had seen the Edwards only one morning at Stanton ; they were therefore all but strangers to her ; and though her spirits were by no means insensible to the expected joys of the evening, she felt a little uncomfortable in the thought of all that was to precede them. Her conversation with Elizabeth, too, giving her some very unpleasant feelings with respect to her own family, had made her more open to disagreeable impressions from any other cause, and increased her sense of the awkwardness of rushing into intimacy on so slight an acquaintance.

There was nothing in the manner of Mrs and Miss Edwards to give immediate change to these ideas. The mother, though a very friendly woman, had a reserved air, and a great deal of formal civility ; and the daughter, a genteel-looking girl of twenty-two, with her hair in papers, seemed very naturally to have caught something of the style of her mother who had brought her up. Emma was soon left to know what they could be, by Elizabeth's being obliged to hurry away ; and some very, very languid remarks on the probable brilliancy of the ball were all that broke at intervals a silence of half an hour before they were joined by the master of the house. Mr Edwards had a much

easier and more communicative air than the ladies of the family ; he was fresh from the street, and he came ready to tell whatever might interest. After a cordial reception of Emma, he turned to his daughter with

“Well, Mary, I bring you good news: the Osbornes will certainly be at the ball to-night. Horses for two carriages are ordered from the White Hart to be at Osborne Castle by nine.”

“I am glad of it,” observed Mrs Edwards, “because their coming gives a credit to our assembly. The Osbornes being known to have been at the first ball, will dispose a great many people to attend the second. It is more than they deserve ; for, in fact, they add nothing to the pleasure of the evening, they come so late and go so early ; but great people have always their charm.”

Mr Edwards proceeded to relate many other little articles of news which his morning’s lounge had supplied him with, and they chatted with greater briskness, till Mrs Edwards’ moment for dressing arrived, and the young ladies were carefully recommended to lose no time. Emma was shown to a very comfortable apartment, and as soon as Mrs Edwards’ civilities could leave her to herself, the happy occupation, the first bliss of a ball, began. The girls, dressing in some measure together, grew unavoidably better acquainted. Emma found in Miss Edwards the show of good sense, a modest unpretending mind, and a great wish of obliging ; and when they returned to the

parlour where Mrs Edwards was sitting, respectably attired in one of the two satin gowns which went through the winter, and a new cap from the milliner's, they entered it with much easier feelings and more natural smiles than they had taken away. Their dress was now to be examined: Mrs Edwards acknowledged herself too old-fashioned to approve of every modern extravagance, however sanctioned; and though complacently viewing her daughter's good looks, would give but a qualified admiration; and Mr Edwards, not less satisfied with Mary, paid some compliments of good-humoured gallantry to Emma at her expense. The discussion led to more intimate remarks, and Miss Edwards gently asked Emma if she was not often reckoned very like her youngest brother. Emma thought she could perceive a faint blush accompany the question, and there seemed something still more suspicious in the manner in which Mr Edwards took up the subject.

"You are paying Miss Emma no great compliment, I think, Mary," said he, hastily. "Mr Sam Watson is a very good sort of young man, and I dare say a very clever surgeon; but his complexion has been rather too much exposed to all weathers to make a likeness to him very flattering."

Mary apologised, in some confusion.

"She had not thought a strong likeness at all incompatible with very different degrees of beauty. There might be resemblance in countenance, and the complexion and even the features be very unlike."

"I know nothing of my brother's beauty," said Emma, "for I have not seen him since he was seven years old; but my father reckons us alike."

"Mr Watson!" cried Mr Edwards; "well, you astonish me. There is not the least likeness in the world; your brother's eyes are grey, yours are brown; he has a long face, and a wide mouth. My dear, do *you* perceive the least resemblance?"

"Not the least: Miss Emma Watson puts me very much in mind of her eldest sister, and sometimes I see a look of Miss Penelope, and once or twice there has been a glance of Mr Robert, but I cannot perceive any likeness to Mr Samuel."

"I see the likeness between her and Miss Watson," replied Mr Edwards, "very strongly, but I am not sensible of the others. I do not much think she is like any of the family *but* Miss Watson; but I am very sure there is no resemblance between her and Sam."

This matter was settled, and they went to dinner.

"Your father, Miss Emma, is one of my oldest friends," said Mr Edwards, as he helped her to wine, when they were drawn round the fire to enjoy their dessert. "We must drink to his better health. It is a great concern to me, I assure you, that he should be such an invalid. I know nobody who likes a game of cards, in a social way, better than he does, and very few people that play a fairer rubber. It is a thousand pities that he should be so deprived of the pleasure. For now we have

a quiet little Whist Club that meets three times a week at the White Hart ; and if he could but have his health, how much he would enjoy it ! ”

“ I dare say he would, sir ; and I wish with all my heart he were equal to it. ”

“ Your club would be better fitted for an invalid, ” said Mrs Edwards, “ if you did not keep it up so late. ” This was an old grievance.

“ So late, my dear ! What are you talking of ? ” cried the husband, with sturdy pleasantry. “ We are always at home before midnight. They would laugh at Osborne Castle to hear you call *that* late ; they are but just rising from dinner at midnight. ”

“ That is nothing to the purpose, ” retorted the lady, calmly. “ The Osbornes are to be no rule for us. You had better meet every night, and break up two hours sooner. ”

So far the subject was very often carried ; but Mr and Mrs Edwards were so wise as never to pass that point ; and Mr Edwards now turned to something else. He had lived long enough in the idleness of a town to become a little of a gossip, and having some anxiety to know more of the circumstances of his young guest than had yet reached him, he began with

“ I think, Miss Emma, I remember your aunt very well, about thirty years ago ; I am pretty sure I danced with her in the old rooms at Bath the year before I married. She was a very fine woman then, but like other people, I suppose, she is grown somewhat older since that time. I hope she is likely to be happy in her second choice. ”

"I hope so ; I believe so, sir," said Emma, in some agitation.

"Mr Turner had not been dead a great while, I think ? "

"About two years, sir."

"I forget what her name is now."

"O'Brien."

"Irish ! Ah ! I remember ; and she is gone to settle in Ireland. I do not wonder that you should not wish to go with her into *that* country, Miss Emma ; but it must be a great deprivation to her, poor lady ! after bringing you up like a child of her own."

"I was not so ungrateful, sir," said Emma, warmly, "as to wish to be anywhere but with her. It did not suit Captain O'Brien that I should be of the party."

"Captain !" repeated Mrs Edwards. "The gentleman is in the army then ? "

"Yes, ma'am."

"Aye, there is nothing like your officers for captivating the ladies, young or old. There is no resisting a cockade, my dear."

"I hope there is," said Mrs Edwards gravely, with a quick glance at her daughter ; and Emma had just recovered from her own perturbation in time to see a blush on Miss Edwards' cheek, and in remembering what Elizabeth had said of Captain Hunter, to wonder and waver between his influence and her brother's.

"Elderly ladies should be careful how they make a second choice," observed Mr Edwards.

“Carefulness and discretion should not be confined to elderly ladies, or to a second choice,” added his wife. “They are quite as necessary to young ladies in their first.”

“Rather more so, my dear,” replied he; “because young ladies are likely to feel the effects of it longer. When an old lady plays the fool, it is not in the course of nature that she should suffer from it many years.”

Emma drew her hand across her eyes, and Mrs Edwards, on perceiving it, changed the subject to one of less anxiety to all.

With nothing to do but to expect the hour of setting off, the afternoon was long to the two young ladies; and though Miss Edwards was rather discomposed at the very early hour which her mother always fixed for going, that early hour itself was watched for with some eagerness. The entrance of the tea-things at seven o'clock was some relief; and luckily Mr and Mrs Edwards always drank a dish extraordinary and ate an additional muffin when they were going to sit up late, which lengthened the ceremony almost to the wished-for moment.

At a little before eight o'clock the Tomlinsons' carriage was heard to go by, which was the constant signal for Mrs Edwards to order hers to the door; and in a very few minutes the party were transported from the quiet and warmth of a snug parlour to the bustle, noise, and draughts of air of a broad entrance passage of an inn. Mrs Edwards, carefully guarding her own dress, while she attended with

yet greater solicitude to the proper security of her young charges' shoulders and throats, led the way up the wide staircase, while no sound of a ball but the first scrape of one violin blessed the ears of her followers; and Miss Edwards, on hazarding the anxious enquiry of whether there were many people come yet, was told by the waiter, as she knew she should, that "Mr Tomlinson's family were in the room."

In passing along a short gallery to the assembly room, brilliant in lights before them, they were accosted by a young man in a morning-dress and boots, who was standing in the doorway of a bed-chamber, apparently on purpose to see them go by.

"Ah! Mrs Edwards, how do you do? How do you do, Miss Edwards?" he cried, with an easy air. "You are determined to be in good time, I see, as usual. The candles are but this moment lit."

"I like to get a good seat by the fire, you know, Mr Musgrave," replied Mrs Edwards.

"I am this moment going to dress," said he. "I am waiting for my stupid fellow. We shall have a famous ball. The Osbornes are certainly coming; you may depend upon *that*, for I was with Lord Osborne this morning—"

The party passed on. Mrs Edwards' satin gown swept along the clean floor of the ballroom to the fireplace at the upper end, where one party only were formally seated, while three or four officers were lounging together, passing in and out from the adjoining card-room. A very stiff meeting

between these near neighbours ensued, and as soon as they were all duly placed again, Emma, in a low whisper, which became the solemn scene, said, to Miss Edwards :

“ The gentleman we passed in the passage was Mr Musgrave, then ? he is reckoned remarkably agreeable, I understand.”

Miss Edwards answered hesitatingly, “ Yes ; he is very much liked by many people ; but *we* are not very intimate.”

“ He is rich, is not he ? ”

“ He has about eight or nine hundred a-year, I believe. He came into possession of it when he was very young, and my father and mother think it has given him rather an unsettled turn. He is no favourite with them.”

CHAPTER III

THE cold and empty appearance of the room, and the demure air of the small cluster of females at one end of it, began soon to give way. The inspiriting sound of other carriages was heard, and continual accessions of portly chaperones, and strings of smartly dressed girls, were received, with now and then a fresh gentleman straggler, who, if not enough in love to station himself near any fair creature, seemed glad to escape into the card-room.

Among the increasing number of military men, one now made his way to Miss Edwards with an air of *empressement* which decidedly said to her companion, "I am Captain Hunter"; and Emma, who could not but watch her at such a moment, saw her looking rather distressed, but by no means displeased, and heard an engagement formed for the first two dances, which made her think her brother Sam's a hopeless case.

Emma in the meanwhile was not unobserved or unadmired herself. A new face, and a very pretty one, could not be slighted. Her name was whispered from one party to another, and no sooner had the signal been given by the orchestra's striking up a favourite air, which seemed to call the young to their duty, and people the centre of the room, than she found herself engaged to dance

with a brother officer, introduced by Captain Hunter.

Emma Watson was not more than of the middle height, well made and plump, with an air of healthy vigour. Her skin was very brown, but clear, smooth, and glowing, which, with a lively eye, a sweet smile, and an open countenance, gave beauty to attract, and expression to make that beauty improve on acquaintance. Having no reason to be dissatisfied with her partner, the evening began very pleasantly to her; and her feelings perfectly coincided with the reiterated observation of others, that it was an excellent ball. The two first dances were not quite over when the returning sound of carriages after a long interruption called general notice, and "The Osbornes are coming, the Osbornes are coming!" was repeated round the room. After some minutes of extraordinary bustle without and watchful curiosity within, the important party, preceded by the attentive master of the inn to open a door which was never shut, made their appearance. They consisted of Lady Osborne; her son, Lord Osborne; her daughter, Miss Osborne; Miss Carr, her daughter's friend; Mr Howard, formerly tutor to Lord Osborne, now clergyman of the parish in which the castle stood; Mrs Blake, a widow sister, who lived with him; her son, a fine boy of ten years old; and Mr Tom Musgrave, who, probably, imprisoned within his own room, had been listening in bitter impatience to the sound of the music for the last half-hour. In their progress up the room they paused almost

immediately behind Emma to receive the compliments of some acquaintance, and she heard Lady Osborne observe that they had made a point of coming early for the gratification of Mrs Blake's little boy, who was uncommonly fond of dancing. Emma looked at them all as they passed, but chiefly and with most interest on Tom Musgrave, who was certainly a genteel, good-looking young man. Of the females, Lady Osborne had by much the finest person; though nearly fifty, she was very handsome, and had all the dignity of rank.

Lord Osborne was a very fine young man; but there was an air of coldness, of carelessness, even of awkwardness about him, which seemed to speak him out of his element in a ball-room. He came, in fact, only because it was judged expedient for him to please the borough; he was not fond of women's company, and he never danced. Mr Howard was an agreeable-looking man, a little more than thirty.

At the conclusion of the two dances, Emma found herself, she knew not how, seated among the Osborne set; and she was immediately struck with the fine countenance and animated gestures of the little boy, as he was standing before his mother, wondering when they should begin.

"You will not be surprised at Charles's impatience," said Mrs Blake, a lively, pleasant-looking little woman of five or six and thirty, to a lady who was standing near her, "when you know what a partner he is to have. Miss Osborne has been so very kind as to promise to dance the two first dances with him."

“Oh, yes! we have been engaged this week,” cried the boy, “and we are to dance down every couple.”

On the other side of Emma, Miss Osborne, Miss Carr, and a party of young men were standing engaged in very lively consultation; and soon afterwards she saw the smartest officer of the set walking off to the orchestra to order the dance, while Miss Osborne, passing before her to her little expecting partner, hastily said, “Charles, I beg your pardon for not keeping my engagement, but I am going to dance these two dances with Colonel Beresford. I know you will excuse me, and I will certainly dance with you after tea.” And without staying for an answer, she turned again to Miss Carr, and in another minute was led by Colonel Beresford to begin the set. If the poor little boy’s face had in its happiness been interesting to Emma, it was infinitely more so under this sudden reverse; he stood the picture of disappointment with crimsoned cheeks, quivering lips, and eyes bent on the floor. His mother, stifling her own mortification, tried to soothe his, with the prospect of Miss Osborne’s second promise; but though he contrived to utter with an effort of boyish bravery, “Oh, I do not mind it!” it was very evident by the unceasing agitation of his features that he minded it as much as ever.

Emma did not think or reflect; she felt and acted.

“I shall be very happy to dance with you, sir, if you like it,” said she, holding out her hand with

the most unaffected good-humour. The boy, in one moment restored to all his first delight, looked joyfully at his mother, and stepping forwards with an honest, simple "Thank you, ma'am," was instantly ready to attend his new acquaintance. The thankfulness of Mrs Blake was more diffuse; with a look most expressive of unexpected pleasure and lively gratitude, she turned to her neighbour with repeated and fervent acknowledgments of so great and condescending a kindness to her boy. Emma with perfect truth could assure her that she could not be giving greater pleasure than she felt herself; and Charles being provided with his gloves and charged to keep them on, they joined the set which was now rapidly forming, with nearly equal complacency. It was a partnership which could not be noticed without surprise. It gained her a broad stare from Miss Osborne and Miss Carr as they passed her in the dance. "Upon my word, Charles, you are in luck," said the former, as she turned him; "you have got a better partner than me"; to which the happy Charles answered "Yes!"

Tom Musgrave, who was dancing with Miss Carr, gave her many inquisitive glances; and after a time Lord Osborne himself came, and under pretence of talking to Charles, stood to look at his partner. Though rather distressed by such observation, Emma could not repent what she had done, so happy had it made both the boy and his mother; the latter of whom was continually making opportunities of addressing her with the warmest

civility. Her little partner she found, though bent chiefly on dancing, was not unwilling to speak, when her questions or remarks gave him anything to say; and she learnt, by a sort of inevitable enquiry, that he had two brothers and a sister, that they and their mamma all lived with his uncle at Wickstead, that his uncle taught him Latin, that he was very fond of riding, and had a horse of his own given him by Lord Osborne; and that he had been out once already with Lord Osborne's hounds.

At the end of these dances Emma found they were to drink tea; Miss Edwards gave her a caution to be at hand, in a manner which convinced her of Mrs Edwards' holding it very important to have them both close to her when she moved into the tea-room; and Emma was accordingly on the alert to gain her proper station. It was always the pleasure of the company to have a little bustle and crowd when they adjourned for refreshment. The tea-room was a small room within the card-room; and in passing through the latter, where the passage was straitened by tables, Mrs Edwards and her party were for a few moments hemmed in. It happened close by Lady Osborne's casino table; Mr. Howard, who belonged to it, spoke to his nephew; and Emma, on perceiving herself the object of attention both to Lady Osborne and him, had just turned away her eyes in time to avoid seeming to hear her young companion exclaim delightedly aloud, "Oh, uncle! do look at my partner. She is so pretty!" As they were

immediately in motion again, however, Charles was hurried off without being able to receive his uncle's suffrage. On entering the tea-room in which two long tables were prepared, Lord Osborne was to be seen quite alone at the end of one, as if retreating as far as he could from the ball, to enjoy his own thoughts and gape without restraint. Charles instantly pointed him out to Emma: "There's Lord Osborne, let you and I go and sit by him."

"No, no," said Emma, laughing. "you must sit with my friends."

Charles was now free enough to hazard a few questions in his turn. "What o'clock was it?"

"Eleven."

"Eleven! and I am not at all sleepy. Mamma said I should be asleep before ten. Do you think Miss Osborne will keep her word with me when tea is over?"

"Oh, yes! I suppose so;" though she felt that she had no better reason to give than that Miss Osborne had *not* kept it before.

"When shall you come to Osborne Castle?"

"Never, probably. I am not acquainted with the family."

"But you may come to Wickstead and see mamma, and she can take you to the castle. There is a monstrous curious stuffed fox there, and a badger, anybody would think they were alive. It is a pity you should not see them."

CHAPTER IV

ON rising from tea, there was again a scramble for the pleasure of being first out of the room, which happened to be increased by one or two of the card-parties having just broken up and the players being disposed to move exactly the different way. Among these was Mr Howard, his sister leaning on his arm ; and no sooner were they within reach of Emma, than Mrs Blake, calling her notice by a friendly touch, said, " Your goodness to Charles, my dear Miss Watson, brings all his family upon you. Give me leave to introduce my brother, Mr Howard." Emma curtsied, the gentleman bowed, made a hasty request for the honour of her hand in the two next dances, to which as hasty an affirmative was given, and they were immediately impelled in opposite directions.* Emma was very well pleased with the circumstance ; there was a quietly cheerful, gentlemanlike air in Mr Howard which suited her ; and in a few minutes afterwards the value of her engagement increased, when, as she was sitting in the card-room, somewhat screened by a door, she heard Lord Osborne, who was lounging on a vacant table near her, call Tom Musgrave towards him and say, " Why do not you dance with that beautiful Emma Watson ? I want you to dance with her, and I will come and stand by you."

"I was determined on it this very moment, my lord; I'll be introduced and dance with her directly."

"Aye, do; and if you find she does not want much talking to, you may introduce me by and by."

"Very well, my lord. If she is like her sisters, she will only want to be listened to. I will go this moment. I shall find her in the tea-room. That stiff old Mrs Edwards has never done tea."

Away he went, Lord Osborne after him; and Emma lost no time in hurrying from her corner, exactly the other way, forgetting in her haste that she left Mrs Edwards behind.

"We had quite lost you," said Mrs Edwards, who followed her with Mary, in less than five minutes. "If you prefer this room to the other there is no reason why you should not be here, but we had better all be together."

Emma was saved the trouble of apologising, by their being joined at the moment by Tom Musgrave, who requesting Mrs Edwards aloud to do him the honour of presenting him to Miss Emma Watson, left that good lady without any choice in the business, but that of testifying by the coldness of her manner that she did it unwillingly. The honour of dancing with her was solicited without loss of time, and Emma, however she might like to be thought a beautiful girl by lord or commoner, was so little disposed to favour Tom Musgrave himself that she had considerable satisfaction in avowing her previous engagement. He was evidently surprised and discomposed. The style of

her last partner had probably led him to believe her not overpowered with applications.

"My little friend, Charles Blake," he cried, "must not expect to engross you the whole evening. We can never suffer this. It is against the rules of the assembly, and I am sure it will never be patronised by our good friend here, Mrs Edwards; she is by much too nice a judge of decorum to give her licence to such a dangerous particularity."

"I am not going to dance with Master Blake, sir."

The gentleman, a little disconcerted, could only hope he might be more fortunate another time, and seeming unwilling to leave her, though his friend Lord Osborne was waiting in the doorway for the result, as Emma with some amusement perceived, he began to make civil enquiries after her family.

"How comes it that we have not the pleasure of seeing your sisters here this evening? Our assemblies have been used to be so well treated by them that we do not know how to take this neglect."

"My eldest sister is the only one at home, and she could not leave my father."

"Miss Watson the only one at home! You astonish me! It seems but the day before yesterday that I saw them all three in this town. But I am afraid I have been a very sad neighbour of late. I hear dreadful complaints of my negligence wherever I go, and I confess it is a shameful length of time since I was at Stanton. But I shall now endeavour to make myself amends for the past."

Emma's calm curtsy in reply must have struck

him as very unlike the encouraging warmth he had been used to receive from her sisters, and gave him probably the novel sensation of doubting his own influence, and of wishing for more attention than she bestowed. The dancing now recommenced; Miss Carr being impatient to *call*, everybody was required to stand up; and Tom Musgrave's curiosity was appeased on seeing Mr Howard come forward and claim Emma's hand.

"That will do as well for me," was Lord Osborne's remark, when his friend carried him the news, and he was continually at Howard's elbow during the two dances.

The frequency of his appearance there was the only unpleasant part of the engagement, the only objection she could make to Mr Howard. In himself, she thought him as agreeable as he looked; though chatting on the commonest topics, he had a sensible, unaffected way of expressing himself, which made them all worth hearing, and she only regretted that he had not been able to make his pupil's manners as unexceptionable as his own. The two dances seemed very short, and she had her partner's authority for considering them so. At their conclusion, the Osbornes and their train were all on the move.

"We are off at last," said his lordship to Tom; "how much longer do you stay in this heavenly place?—till sunrise?"

"No, faith! my lord, I have had quite enough of it. I assure you I shall not show myself here again when I have had the honour of attending

Lady Osborne to her carriage: I shall retreat in as much secrecy as possible to the most remote corner of the house, where I shall order a barrel of oysters, and be famously snug."

"Let me see you soon at the castle; and bring me word how she looks by daylight."

Emma and Mrs. Blake parted as old acquaintance, and Charles shook her by the hand and wished her good-bye at least a dozen times. From Miss Osborne and Miss Carr she received something like a jerking curtsy as they passed her; even Lady Osborne gave her a look of complacency, and his lordship actually came back after the others were out of the room, to "beg her pardon," and look in the window-seat behind her for the gloves which were visibly compressed in his hand. As Tom Musgrave was seen no more, we may suppose his plan to have succeeded, and imagine him mortifying with his barrel of oysters in dreary solitude, or gladly assisting the landlady in her bar to make fresh negus for the happy dancers above. Emma could not help missing the party by whom she had been, though in some respects unpleasantly, distinguished, and the two dances which followed and concluded the ball were rather flat in comparison with the others. Mr. Edwards having played with good luck, they were some of the last in the room.

"Here we are back again, I declare," said Emma sorrowfully, as she walked into the dining-room, where the table was prepared, and the neat upper maid was lighting the candles.

“ My dear Miss Edwards, how soon it is at an end ! I wish it could all come over again.”

A great deal of kind pleasure was expressed in her having enjoyed the evening so much ; and Mr Edwards was as warm as herself in the praise of the fullness, brilliancy, and spirit of the meeting, though as he had been fixed the whole time at the same table in the same room, with only one change of chairs, it might have seemed a matter scarcely perceived. But he had won four rubbers out of five, and everything went well. His daughter felt the advantage of this gratified state of mind, in the course of the remarks and retrospections which now ensued over the welcome soup.

“ How came you not to dance with either of the Mr Tomlinsons, Mary ? ” said her mother.

“ I was always engaged when they asked me.”

“ I thought you were to have stood up with Mr James the last two dances ; Mrs Tomlinson told me he was gone to ask you, and I heard you say two minutes before that you were *not* engaged.”

“ Yes, but there was a mistake ; I had misunderstood ; I did not know I was engaged. I thought it had been for the two dances after, if we stayed so long ; but Captain Hunter assured me it was for those very two.”

“ So you ended with Captain Hunter, Mary, did you ? ” said her father. “ And whom did you begin with ? ”

“ Captain Hunter,” was repeated, in a very humble tone.

"Hum ! That is being constant, however. But who else did you dance with ?"

"Mr Norton and Mr Styles."

"And who are they ?"

"Mr Norton is a cousin of Captain Hunter's."

"And who is Mr Styles ?"

"One of his particular friends."

"All in the same regiment," added Mrs Edwards. "Mary was surrounded by red-coats all the evening. I should have been better pleased to see her dancing with some of our old neighbours, I confess."

"Yes, yes ; we must not neglect our old neighbours. But if these soldiers are quicker than other people, in a ball-room, what are young ladies to do ?"

"I think there is no occasion for their engaging themselves so many dances beforehand, Mr Edwards."

"No, perhaps not ; but I remember, my dear, when you and I did the same."

Mrs Edwards said no more, and Mary breathed again. A good deal of good-humoured pleasantry followed, and Emma went to bed in charming spirits, her head full of Osbornes, Blakes, and Howards.

CHAPTER V

THE next morning brought a great many visitors. It was the way of the place always to call on Mrs Edwards the morning after a ball, and this neighbourly inclination was increased in the present instance by a general spirit of curiosity on Emma's account, as everybody wanted to look again at the girl who had been admired the night before by Lord Osborne. Many were the eyes, and various the degrees of approbation with which she was examined. Some saw no fault, and some no beauty. With some her brown skin was the annihilation of every grace, and others could never be persuaded that she was half so handsome as Elizabeth Watson had been ten years ago. The morning passed quickly away in discussing the merits of the ball with all this succession of company, and Emma was at once astonished by finding it two o'clock, and considering that she had heard nothing of her father's chair. After this discovery she had walked twice to the window to examine the street, and was on the point of asking leave to ring the bell and make enquiries, when the light sound of a carriage driving up to the door set her heart at ease. She stepped again to the window, but instead of the convenient though very un-smart family equipage perceived a neat curricle. Mr Musgrave was

shortly afterwards announced; and Mrs Edwards put on her very stiffest look at the sound. Not at all dismayed, however, by her chilling air, he paid his compliments to each of the ladies with no unbecoming ease, and continuing to address Emma presented her a note, which, "He had the honour of bringing from her sister, but to which he must observe a verbal postscript from himself would be requisite."

The note, which Emma was beginning to read rather *before* Mrs Edwards had entreated her to use no ceremony, contained a few lines from Elizabeth importing that their father, in consequence of being unusually well, had taken the sudden resolution of attending the visitation that day, and that as his road lay quite wide from D—— it was impossible for her to come home till the following morning, unless the Edwards would send her, which was hardly to be expected, or she could meet with any chance conveyance, or did not mind walking so far. She had scarcely run her eye through the whole, before she found herself obliged to listen to Tom Musgrave's further account.

"I received that note from the fair hands of Miss Watson only ten minutes ago," said he. "I met her in the village of Stanton, whither my good stars prompted me to turn my horses' heads. She was at that moment in quest of a person to employ on the errand, and I was fortunate enough to convince her that she could not find a more willing or speedy messenger than myself. Remember, I say nothing of my disinterestedness. My reward

is to be the indulgence of conveying you to Stanton in my curicle. Though they are not written down, I bring your sister's orders for the same."

Emma felt distressed; she did not like the proposal—she did not wish to be on terms of intimacy with the proposer—and yet, fearful of encroaching on the Edwards, as well as wishing to go home herself, she was at a loss how entirely to decline what he offered. Mrs Edwards continued silent, either not understanding the case, or waiting to see how the young lady's inclination lay. Emma thanked him, but professed herself very unwilling to give him so much trouble. "The trouble was of course honour, pleasure, delight—what had he or his horses to do?" Still she hesitated. "She believed she must beg leave to decline his assistance—she was rather afraid of the sort of carriage—the distance was not beyond a walk." Mrs Edwards was silent no longer. She enquired into the particulars, and then said, "We shall be extremely happy, Miss Emma, if you can give us the pleasure of your company till to-morrow; but if you cannot conveniently do so, our carriage is quite at your service, and Mary will be pleased with the opportunity of seeing your sister."

This was precisely what Emma had longed for, and she accepted the offer most thankfully, acknowledging that as Elizabeth was entirely alone, it was her wish to return home to dinner. The plan was warmly opposed by their visitor——

"I cannot suffer it, indeed. I must not be deprived of the happiness of escorting you. I

assure you there is not a possibility of fear with my horses. You might guide them yourself. *Your sisters* all know how quiet they are; they have none of them the smallest scruple in trusting themselves with me, even on a race-course. Believe me," added he, lowering his voice, "*you* are quite safe—the danger is only *mine*."

Emma was not more disposed to oblige him for all this.

"And as to Mrs Edwards' carriage being used the day after a ball, it is a thing quite out of rule, I assure you—never heard of before; the old coachman will look as black as his horses—won't he, Miss Edwards?"

No notice was taken. The ladies were silently firm, and the gentleman found himself obliged to submit.

"What a famous ball we had last night!" he cried, after a short pause. "How long did you keep it up after the Osbornes and I went away?"

"We had two dances more."

"It is making it too much of a fatigue, I think, to stay so late. I suppose your set was not a very full one."

"Yes; quite as full as ever, except the Osbornes. There seemed no vacancy anywhere, and everybody danced with uncommon spirit to the very last."

Emma said this, though against her conscience.

"Indeed! Perhaps I might have looked in upon you again, if I had been aware of as much, for I am rather fond of dancing than not. Miss Osborne is a charming girl, is not she?"

"I do not think her handsome," replied Emma, to whom all this was chiefly addressed.

"Perhaps she is not critically handsome, but her manners are delightful. And Fanny Carr is a most interesting little creature. You can imagine nothing more *naïve* or *piquante*; and what do you think of Lord Osborne, Miss Watson?"

"That he would be handsome even though he were *not* a lord, and, perhaps, better bred; more desirous of pleasing, and showing himself pleased in a right place."

"Upon my word, you are severe upon my friend! I assure you Lord Osborne is a very good fellow."

"I do not dispute his virtues, but I do not like his careless air."

"If it were not a breach of confidence," replied Tom, with an important look, "perhaps I might be able to win a more favourable opinion of poor Osborne."

Emma gave him no encouragement, and he was obliged to keep his friend's secret. He was also obliged to put an end to his visit, for Mrs Edwards having ordered her carriage, there was no time to be lost on Emma's side in preparing for it. Miss Edwards accompanied her home, but as it was dinner-hour at Stanton, stayed with them only a few minutes.

CHAPTER VI

“Now, my dear Emma,” said Miss Watson, as soon as they were alone, “you must talk to me all the rest of the day without stopping, or I shall not be satisfied. But first of all Nanny shall bring in the dinner. Poor thing! You will not dine as you did yesterday, for we have nothing but some fried beef. How nice Mary Edwards looks in her new pelisse! And now tell me how you like them all, and what I am to say to Sam. I have begun my letter; Jack Stokes is to call for it to-morrow, for his uncle is going within a mile of Guildford next day.”

Nanny brought in the dinner.

“We will wait upon ourselves,” continued Elizabeth, “and then we shall lose no time. And so you would not come home with Tom Musgrave?”

“No. You had said so much against him that I could not wish either for the obligation or the intimacy which the use of his carriage must have created. I should not even have liked the appearance of it.”

“You did very right; though I wonder at your forbearance, and I do not think I could have done it myself. He seemed so eager to fetch you that I could not say no, though it rather went against me to be throwing you together, so well as I knew his tricks; but I did long to see you, and it was a

clever way of getting you home. Besides, it won't do to be too nice. Nobody could have thought of the Edwards letting you have their coach, after the horses being out so late. 'But what am I to say to Sam?' "

"If you are guided by me, you will not encourage him to think of Miss Edwards. The father is decidedly against him, the mother shows him no favour, and I doubt his having any interest with Mary. She danced twice with Captain Hunter, and I think shows him in general as much encouragement as is consistent with her disposition, and the circumstances she is placed in. She once mentioned Sam, and certainly with a little confusion—but that was perhaps merely owing to the consciousness of his liking her, which may very probably have come to her knowledge."

"Oh! dear, yes—she has heard enough of *that* from us all. Poor Sam! he is out of luck as well as other people. For the life of me, Emma, I cannot help feeling for those that are crossed in love. Well, now begin, and give me an account of everything as it happened."

Emma obeyed her, and Elizabeth listened with very little interruption till she heard of Mr Howard as a partner.

"Dance with Mr Howard. Good heavens! You don't say so! Why, he is quite one of the great and grand ones. Did you not find him very high?"

"His manners are of a kind to give *me* much more ease and confidence than Tom Musgrave's."

“Well, go on. I should have been frightened out of my wits to have had anything to do with the Osbornes’ set.”

Emma concluded her narration.

“And so you really did not dance with Tom Musgrave at all? but you must have liked him—you must have been struck with him altogether.”

“I do *not* like him, Elizabeth. I allow his person and air to be good; and that his manner to a certain point—his address rather—is pleasing. But I see nothing else to admire in him. On the contrary, he seems very vain, very conceited, absurdly anxious for distinction, and absolutely contemptible in some of the measures he takes for being so. There is a ridiculousness about him that entertains me; but his company gives me no other agreeable emotion.”

“My dearest Emma! You are like nobody else in the world. It is well Margaret is not by. You do not offend *me*, though I hardly know how to believe you; but Margaret would never forgive such words.”

“I wish Margaret could have heard him profess his ignorance of her being out of the country; he declared it seemed only two days since he had seen her.”

“Aye, that is just like him; and yet this is the man she *will* fancy so desperately in love with her. He is no favourite of mine, as you well know, Emma, but you must think him agreeable. Can you lay your hand on your heart, and say you do not?”

"Indeed I can, both hands; and spread to their widest extent."

"I should like to know the man you *do* think agreeable!"

"His name is Howard."

"Howard! Dear me; I cannot think of him but as playing cards with Lady Osborne, and looking proud. I must own, however, that it *is* a relief to me to find you can speak as you do of Tom Musgrave; my heart did misgive me that you would like him too well. You talked so stoutly beforehand, that I was sadly afraid your brag would be punished. I only hope it will last, and that he will not come on to pay you much attention; it is a hard thing for a woman to stand against the flattering ways of a man when he is bent upon pleasing her."

As their quietly sociable little meal concluded, Miss Watson could not help observing how comfortably it had passed.

"It is so delightful to me," said she, "to have things going on in peace and good-humour. Nobody can tell how much I hate quarrelling. Now, though we have had nothing but fried beef, how good it has all seemed. I wish everybody were as easily satisfied as you; but poor Margaret is very snappish, and Penelope owns she would rather have quarrelling going on than nothing at all."

Mr Watson returned in the evening not the worse for the exertion of the day, and consequently pleased with what he had done, and glad to talk of it over his own fireside. Emma had not foreseen

any interest to herself in the occurrences of a visitation ; but when she heard Mr Howard spoken of as the preacher, and as having given them an excellent sermon, she could not help listening with a quicker ear.

“ I do not know when I have heard a discourse more to my mind,” continued Mr Watson, “ or one better delivered. He reads extremely well, with great propriety, and in a very impressive manner, and at the same time without any theatrical grimace or violence. I own I do not like much action in the pulpit ; I do not like the studied air and artificial inflexions of voice which your very popular and most admired preachers generally have. A simple delivery is much better calculated to inspire devotion, and shows a much better taste. Mr Howard read like a scholar and a gentleman.”

“ And what had you for dinner, sir ? ” said his eldest daughter.

He related the dishes, and told what he had ate himself.

“ Upon the whole,” he added, “ I have had a very comfortable day. My old friends were quite surprised to see me amongst them, and I must say that everybody paid me great attention, and seemed to feel for me as an invalid. They would make me sit near the fire ; and as the partridges were pretty high, Dr Richards would have them sent away to the other end of the table, ‘ that they might not offend Mr Watson,’ which I thought very kind of him. But what pleased me as much as anything was Mr Howard’s attention. There is a pretty

steep flight of steps up to the room we dine in, which do not quite agree with my gouty foot, and Mr Howard walked by me from the bottom to the top, and would make me take his arm. It struck me as very becoming in so young a man, but I am sure I had no claim to expect it ; for I never saw him before in my life. By the by, he enquired after one of my daughters, but I do not know which. I suppose you know among yourselves."

CHAPTER VII

ON the third day after the ball, as Nanny, at five minutes before three, was beginning to bustle into the parlour with the tray and knife-case, she was suddenly called to the front door by the sound of as smart a rap as the end of a riding-whip could give; and though charged by Miss Watson to let nobody in, returned in half a minute with a look of awkward dismay to hold the parlour door open for Lord Osborne and Tom Musgrave. The surprise of the young ladies may be imagined. No visitors would have been welcome at such a moment; but such visitors as these—such an one as Lord Osborne at least, a nobleman and a stranger—was really distressing.

He looked a little embarrassed himself, as, on being introduced by his easy voluble friend, he muttered something of doing himself the honour of waiting upon Mr Watson. Though Emma could not but take the compliment of the visit to herself, she was very far from enjoying it. She felt all the inconsistency of such an acquaintance with the very humble style in which they were obliged to live; and, having in her aunt's family been used to many of the elegancies of life, was fully sensible of all that must be open to the ridicule of richer people in her present home. Of the pain

of such feelings, Elizabeth knew very little. Her simple mind, or juster reason, saved her from such mortification; and though shrinking under a general sense of inferiority, she felt no particular shame. Mr Watson, as the gentlemen had already heard from Nanny, was not well enough to be downstairs. With much concern they took their seats; Lord Osborne near Emma, and the convenient Mr Musgrave, in high spirits at his own importance, on the other side of the fireplace with Elizabeth. *He* was at no loss for words; but when Lord Osborne had hoped that Emma had not caught cold at the ball, he had nothing more to say for some time, and could only gratify his eye by occasional glances at his fair companion. Emma was not inclined to give herself much trouble for his entertainment, and after hard labour of mind, he produced a remark of its being a very fine day, and followed it up with the question of "Have you been walking this morning?"

"No, my lord. We thought it too dirty."

"You should wear half-boots." After another pause:

"Nothing sets off a neat ankle more than a half-boot; nankeen, galoshed with black, looks very well. Do not you like half-boots?"

"Yes; but unless they are so stout as to injure their beauty, they are not fit for country walking."

"Ladies should ride in dirty weather. Do you ride?"

"No, my lord."

"I wonder every lady does not. A woman never looks better than on horseback."

"But every woman may not have the inclination, or the means."

"If they knew how much it became them, they would all have the inclination; and I fancy, Miss Watson, when once they had the inclination, the means would soon follow."

"Your lordship thinks we always have our own way. *That* is a point on which ladies and gentlemen have long disagreed; but without pretending to decide it, I may say that there are some circumstances which even *women* cannot control. Female economy will do a great deal, my lord, but it cannot turn a small income into a large one."

Lord Osborne was silenced. Her manner had been neither sententious nor sarcastic, but there was a something in its mild seriousness, as well as in the words themselves, which made his lordship think; and when he addressed her again, it was with a degree of considerate propriety totally unlike the half-awkward, half-fearless style of his former remarks. It was a new thing with him to wish to please a woman; it was the first time that he had ever felt what was due to a woman in Emma's situation; but as he was wanting neither in sense nor a good disposition, he did not feel it without effect.

"You have not been long in this country, I understand," said he, in the tone of a gentleman. "I hope you are pleased with it."

He was rewarded by a gracious answer, and a more liberal full view of her face than she had yet

bestowed. Unused to exert himself, and happy in contemplating her, he then sat in silence for some minutes longer, while Tom Musgrave was chattering to Elizabeth, till they were interrupted by Nanny's approach, who, half-opening the door and putting in her head, said :

"Please, ma'am, master wants to know why he be'nt to have his dinner?"

The gentlemen, who had hitherto disregarded every symptom, however positive, of the nearness of that meal, now jumped up with apologies, while Elizabeth called briskly after Nanny to "tell Betty to take up the fowls."

"I am sorry it happens so," she added, turning good-humouredly towards Musgrave, "but you know what early hours we keep."

Tom had nothing to say for himself, he knew it very well, and such honest simplicity, such shameless truth, rather bewildered him. Lord Osborne's parting compliments took some time, his inclination for speech seeming to increase with the shortness of the term for indulgence. He recommended exercise in defiance of dirt; spoke again in praise of half-boots; begged that his sister might be allowed to send Emma the name of her shoemaker; and concluded with saying, "My hounds will be hunting this country next week. I believe they will throw off at Stanton Wood on Wednesday at nine o'clock. I mention this in hopes of your being drawn out to see what's going on. If the morning's tolerable, pray do us the honour of giving us your good wishes in person."

The sisters looked on each other with astonishment when their visitors had withdrawn.

"Here's an unaccountable honour!" cried Elizabeth at last. "Who would have thought of Lord Osborne's coming to Stanton? He is very handsome; but Tom Musgrave looks all to nothing, the smartest and most fashionable man of the two. I am glad he did not say anything to me; I would not have had to talk to such a great man for the world. Tom was very agreeable, was not he? But did you hear him ask where Miss Penelope and Miss Margaret were, when he first came in? It put me out of patience. I am glad Nanny had not laid the cloth, however; it would have looked so awkward; just the tray did not signify."

To say that Emma was not flattered by Lord Osborne's visit would be to assert a very unlikely thing, and describe a very odd young lady; but the gratification was by no means unalloyed. His coming was a sort of notice which might please her vanity, but did not suit her pride, and she would rather have known that he wished the visit without presuming to make it, than have seen him at Stanton.

Among other unsatisfactory feelings it once occurred to her to wonder why Mr Howard had not taken the same privilege of coming, and accompanied his lordship, but she was willing to suppose that he had either known nothing about it, or had declined any share in a measure which carried quite as much impertinence in its form as good breeding. Mr Watson was very far from being delighted when he heard what had passed; a little

peevish under immediate pain, and ill-disposed to be pleased, he only replied :

“ Phoo ! Phoo ! What occasion could there be for Lord Osborne’s coming ? I have lived here fourteen years without being noticed by any of the family. It is some fooling of that idle fellow Tom Musgrave. I cannot return the visit. I would not if I could.”

And when Tom Musgrave was met with again, he was commissioned with a message of excuse to Osborne Castle, on the too sufficient plea of Mr Watson’s infirm state of health.

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK or ten days rolled quietly away after this visit before any new bustle arose to interrupt even for half a day the tranquil and affectionate intercourse of the two sisters, whose mutual regard was increasing with the intimate knowledge of each other which such intercourse produced. • The first circumstance to break in on their security was the receipt of a letter from Croydon to announce the speedy return of Margaret, and a visit of two or three days from Mr and Mrs Robert Watson, who undertook to bring her home and wished to see their sister Emma.

It was an expectation to fill the thoughts of the sisters at Stanton, and to busy the hours of one of them at least ; for, as Jane had been a woman of fortune, the preparations for her entertainment were considerable ; and as Elizabeth had at all times more goodwill than method in her guidance of the house, she could make no change without a bustle. An absence of fourteen years had made all her brothers and sisters strangers to Emma, but in her expectation of Margaret there was more than the awkwardness of such an alienation ; she had heard things which made her dread her return ; and the day which brought the party to Stanton seemed to her the probable conclusion of almost all that had been comfortable in the house.

Robert Watson was an attorney at Croydon in a good way of business ; very well satisfied with himself for the same, and for having married the only daughter of the attorney to whom he had been clerk, with a fortune of six thousand pounds. Mrs Robert was not less pleased with herself for having had that six thousand pounds, and for being now in possession of a very smart house in Croydon, where she gave genteel parties, and wore fine clothes. In her person there was nothing remarkable ; her manners were pert and conceited. Margaret was not without beauty ; she had a slight pretty figure, and rather wanted countenance than good features ; but the sharp and anxious expression of her face made her beauty in general little felt. On meeting her long-absent sister, as on every occasion of show, her manner was all affection and her voice all gentleness ; continual smiles and a very slow articulation being her constant resource when determined on pleasing.

She was now "so delighted to see dear, dear Emma," that she could hardly speak a word in a minute.

"I am sure we shall be great friends," she observed, with much sentiment, as they were sitting together. Emma scarcely knew how to answer such a proposition, and the manner in which it was spoken she could not attempt to equal. Mrs Robert Watson eyed her with much familiar curiosity and triumphant compassion ; the loss of the aunt's fortune was uppermost in her mind at the moment of meeting ; and she could not but feel

how much better it was to be the daughter of a gentleman of property in Croydon than the niece of an old woman who threw herself away on an Irish captain. Robert was carelessly kind, as became a prosperous man and a brother; more intent on settling with the post-boy, inveighing against the exorbitant advance in posting, and pondering over a doubtful half-crown, than on welcoming a sister who was no longer likely to have any property for him to get the direction of.

"Your road through the village is infamous, Elizabeth," said he; "worse than ever it was. By heaven! I would indict it if I lived near you. Who is surveyor now?"

There was a little niece at Croydon to be fondly enquired after by the kind-hearted Elizabeth, who regretted very much her not being of the party.

"You are very good," replied her mother, "and I assure you it went very hard with Augusta to have us come away without her. I was forced to say we were only going to church, and promise to come back for her directly. But you know it would not do to bring her without her maid, and I am as particular as ever in having her properly attended to."

"Sweet little darling," cried Margaret. "It quite broke my heart to leave her."

"Then why was you in such a hurry to run away from her?" cried Mrs Robert. "You are a sad, shabby girl. I have been quarrelling with you all the way we came, have not I? Such a visit as this I never heard of! You know how glad we are to have any of you with us, if it be for months to-

gether ; and I am sorry (with a witty smile) we have not been able to make Croydon agreeable this autumn."

"My dearest Jane, do not overpower me with your raillery. You know what inducements I had to bring me home. Spare me, I entreat you. I am no match for your arch sallies."

"Well, I only beg you will not set your neighbours against the place. Perhaps Emma may be tempted to go back with us and stay till Christmas, if you don't put in your word."

Emma was greatly obliged. "I assure you we have very good society at Croydon. I do not much attend the balls, they are rather too mixed ; but our parties are very select and good. I had seven tables last week in my drawing-room. Are you fond of the country ? How do you like Stanton ?"

"Very much," replied Emma, who thought a comprehensive answer most to the purpose. She saw that her sister-in-law despised her immediately. Mrs Robert Watson was indeed wondering what sort of a home Emma could possibly have been used to in Shropshire, and setting it down as certain that the aunt could never have had six thousand pounds.

"How charming Emma is," whispered Margaret to Mrs Robert in her most languishing tone. Emma was quite distressed by such behaviour ; and she did not like it better when she heard Margaret five minutes afterwards say to Elizabeth in a sharp, quick accent, totally unlike the first, "Have you heard from Pen since she went to Chichester ? I

had a letter the other day. I don't find she is likely to make anything of it. I fancy she'll come back 'Miss Penelope' as she went."

Such she feared would be Margaret's common voice when the novelty of her own appearance were over; the tone of artificial sensibility was not recommended by the idea.

The ladies were invited upstairs to prepare for dinner. "I hope you will find things tolerably comfortable, Jane," said Elizabeth, as she opened the door of the spare bed-chamber.

"My good creature," replied Jane, "use no ceremony with me, I entreat you. I am one of those who always take things as they find them. I hope I can put up with a small apartment for two or three nights without making a piece of work. I always wish to be treated quite *en famille* when I come to see you. And now I do hope you have not been getting a great dinner for us. Remember we never eat suppers."

"I suppose," said Margaret rather quickly to Emma, "you and I are to be together; Elizabeth always takes care to have a room to herself."

"No—Elizabeth gives me half hers."

"Oh!" (in a softened voice, and rather mortified to find that she was not ill-used). "I am sorry I am not to have the pleasure of your company, especially as it makes me nervous to be much alone."

Emma was the first of the females in the parlour again; on entering it she found her brother alone.

"So, Emma," said he, "you are quite the stranger

at home. It must seem odd enough for you to be here. A pretty piece of work your Aunt Turner has made of it! By heaven! A woman should never be trusted with money. I always said she ought to have settled something on you, as soon as her husband died."

"But that would have been trusting *me* with money," replied Emma, "and *I* am a woman too."

"It might have been secured to your future use, without your having any power over it now. What a blow it must have been upon you! To find yourself, instead of heiress of eight thousand or nine thousand pounds, sent back a weight upon your family, without a sixpence. I hope the old woman will smart for it."

"Do not speak disrespectfully of her—she was very good to me; and if she has made an imprudent choice, she will suffer more from it herself than *I* can possibly do."

"I do not mean to distress you, but you know everybody must think her an old fool. I thought Turner had been reckoned an extraordinarily sensible, clever man. How the devil came he to make such a will?"

"My uncle's sense is not at all impeached in my opinion by his attachment to my aunt. She had been an excellent wife to him. The most liberal and enlightened minds are always the most confiding. The event has been unfortunate, but my uncle's memory is, if possible, endeared to me by such a proof of tender respect for my aunt."

"That's odd sort of talking. He might have

provided decently for his widow, without leaving everything that he had to dispose of, or any part of it, at her mercy."

"My aunt may have erred," said Emma warmly. "She *has* erred, but my uncle's conduct was faultless. I was her own niece, and he left to herself the power and the pleasure of providing for me."

"But, unluckily, she has left the pleasure of providing for you to your father, and without the power. That's the long and short of the business. After keeping you at a distance from your family for such a length of time as must do away all natural affection among us, and breeding you up (I suppose) in a superior style, you are returned upon their hands without a sixpence."

"You know," replied Emma, struggling with her tears, "my uncle's melancholy state of health. He was a greater invalid than my father. He could not leave home."

"I do not mean to make you cry," said Robert, rather softened—and after a short silence, by way of changing the subject, he added: "I am just come from my father's room; he seems very indifferent. It will be a sad break-up when he dies. Pity you can none of you get married! You must come to Croydon as well as the rest, and see what you can do there. I believe if Margaret had had a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds, there was a young man who would have thought of her."

Emma was glad when they were joined by the others; it was better to look at her sister-in-law's finery than listen to Robert, who had equally

irritated and grieved her. Mrs Robert, exactly as smart as she had been at her own party, came in with apologies for her dress.

"I would not make you wait," said she, "so I put on the first thing I met with. I am afraid I am a sad figure. My dear Mr W. (to her husband) you have not put any fresh powder in your hair."

"No, I do not intend it. I think there is powder enough in my hair for my wife and sisters."

"Indeed you ought to make some alteration in your dress before dinner when you are out visiting, though you do not at home."

"Nonsense."

"It is very odd you should not like to do what other gentlemen do. Mr Marshall and Mr Hemmings change their dress every day of their lives before dinner. And what was the use of my putting up your last new coat, if you are never to wear it?"

"Do be satisfied with being fine yourself, and leave your husband alone."

To put an end to this altercation and soften the evident vexation of her sister-in-law, Emma (though in no spirits to make such nonsense easy) began to admire her gown. It produced immediate complacency.

"Do you like it?" said she. "I am very happy. It has been excessively admired, but sometimes I think the pattern too large. I shall wear one tomorrow that I think you will prefer to this. Have you seen the one I gave Margaret?"

CHAPTER IX

DINNER came, and except when Mrs Robert looked at her husband's head, she continued gay and flippant, chiding Elizabeth for the profusion on the table, and absolutely protesting against the entrance of the roast turkey, which formed the only exception to "You see your dinner." "I do beg and entreat that no turkey may be seen to-day. I am really frightened out of my wits with the number of dishes we have already. Let us have no turkey I beseech you."

"My dear," replied Elizabeth, "the turkey is roasted, and it may just as well come in as stay in the kitchen. Besides, if it is cut, I am in hopes my father may be tempted to eat a bit, for it is rather a favourite dish."

"You may have it in, my dear, but I assure you I shan't touch it."

Mr Watson had not been well enough to join the party at dinner, but was prevailed on to come down and drink tea with them.

"I wish he may be able to have a game of cards to-night," said Elizabeth to Mrs Robert, after seeing her father comfortably seated in his arm-chair.

"Not on my account, my dear, I beg. You know I am no card-player. I think a snug chat infinitely better. I always say cards are very well

sometimes, to break a formal circle, but one never wants them among friends."

"I was thinking of its being something to amuse my father," said Elizabeth, "if it was not disagreeable to you. He says his head won't bear whist, but perhaps if we make a round game he may be tempted to sit down with us."

"By all means, my dear creature, I am quite at your service, only do not oblige me to choose the game, that's all. *Speculation* is the only round game at Croydon now, but I can play anything. When there is only one or two of you at home, you must be quite at a loss to amuse him. Why do you not get him to play at cribbage? Margaret and I have played at cribbage most nights that we have not been engaged."

A sound like a distant carriage was at this moment caught. Everybody listened; it became more decided; it certainly drew nearer. It was an unusual sound for Stanton at any time of the day, for the village was on no very public road, and contained no gentleman's family but the Rector's. The wheels rapidly approached; in two minutes the general expectation was answered; they stopped beyond a doubt at the garden-gate of the Parsonage. Who could it be? It was certainly a post-chaise. Penelope was the only creature to be thought of. She might perhaps have met with some unexpected opportunity of returning. A pause of suspense ensued. Steps were distinguished, first along the paved footway which led under the window of the house to the front door, and then within the passage.

They were the steps of a man. It could not be Penelope. It must be Samuel. The door opened, and displayed Tom Musgrave in the wrap of a traveller. He had been in London and was now on his way home, and he had come half a mile out of his road merely to call for ten minutes at Stanton. He loved to take people by surprise with sudden visits at extraordinary seasons ; and, in the present instance, had had the additional motive of being able to tell the Miss Watsons, whom he depended on finding sitting quietly employed after tea, that he was going home to an eight o'clock dinner.

As it happened, he did not give more surprise than he received when, instead of being shown into the usual little sitting-room, the door of the best parlour (a foot larger each way than the other) was thrown open, and he beheld a circle of smart people, whom he could not immediately recognise, arranged with all the honours of visiting round the fire, and Miss Watson seated at the best Pembroke table, with the best tea-things before her. He stood a few seconds in silent amazement. "Musgrave !" ejaculated Margaret, in a tender voice. He recollected himself, and came forward, delighted to find such a circle of friends, and blessing his good fortune for the unlooked-for indulgence. He shook hands with Robert, bowed and smiled to the ladies, and did everything very prettily, but as to any particularity of address or emotion towards Margaret, Emma, who closely observed him, perceived nothing that did not justify Elizabeth's opinion, though Margaret's modest smiles imported that she

meant to take the visit to herself. He was persuaded without much difficulty to throw off his great-coat and drink tea with them. For "Whether he dined at eight or nine," as he observed, "was a matter of very little consequence"; and without seeming to seek he did not turn away from the chair close by Margaret which she was assiduous in providing him. She had thus secured him from her sisters, but it was not immediately in her power to preserve him from her brother's claims; for as he came avowedly from London, and had left it only four hours ago, the last current report as to public news, and the general opinion of the day, must be understood before Robert could let his attention be yielded to the less national and important demands of the women. At last, however, he was at liberty to hear Margaret's soft address, as she spoke her fears of his having had a most terrible cold, dark, dreadful journey——

"Indeed you should not have set out so late."

"I could not be earlier," he replied. "I was detained chatting at the Bedford by a friend. All hours are alike to me. How long have you been in the country, Miss Margaret?"

"We only came this morning; my kind brother and sister brought me home this very morning. 'Tis singular—is not it?"

"You were gone a great while, were you not? A fortnight, I suppose?"

"*You* may call a fortnight a great while, Mr Musgrave," said Mrs Robert smartly, "but *we* think a month very little. I assure you we bring

her home at the end of a month much against our will."

"A month! Have you really been gone a month? 'tis amazing how time flies."

"You may imagine," said Margaret, in a sort of whisper, "what are my sensations in finding myself once more at Stanton. You know what a sad visitor I make. And I was so excessively impatient to see Emma; I dreaded the meeting, and at the same time longed for it. Do you not comprehend the sort of feeling?"

"Not at all," cried he aloud; "I could never dread a meeting with Miss Emma Watson, or any of her sisters."

It was lucky that he added that finish.

"Were you speaking to me?" said Emma, who had caught her own name.

"Not absolutely," he answered; "but I was thinking of you, as many at a greater distance are probably doing at this moment. Fine open weather, Miss Emma! charming season for hunting."

"Emma is delightful, is not she?" whispered Margaret. "I have found her more than answer my warmest hopes. Did you ever see anything more perfectly beautiful? I think even *you* must be a convert to a brown complexion."

He hesitated. Margaret was fair herself, and he did not particularly want to compliment her; but Miss Osborne and Miss Carr were likewise fair, and his devotion to them carried the day.

"Your sister's complexion," said he at last, "is as fine as a dark complexion can be; but I still

profess my preference of a white skin. You have seen Miss Osborne? She is my model for a truly feminine complexion, and she is very fair.”

“Is she fairer than me?”

Tom made no reply: “Upon my honour, ladies,” said he, giving a glance over his own person, “I am highly indebted to your condescension for admitting me in such *déshabille* into your drawing-room. I really did not consider how unfit I was to be here, or I hope I should have kept my distance. Lady Osborne would tell me that I was growing as careless as her son, if she saw me in this condition.”

The ladies were not wanting in civil returns, and Robert Watson, stealing a view of his own head in an opposite glass, said with equal civility:

“You cannot be more in *déshabille* than myself. We got here so late that I had not time even to put a little fresh powder into my hair.”

Emma could not help entering into what she supposed her sister-in-law’s feelings at the moment.

When the tea-things were removed, Tom began to talk of his carriage; but the old card-table being set out, and the fish and counters, with a tolerably clean pack, brought forward from the buffet by Miss Watson, the general voice was so urgent with him to join their party that he agreed to allow himself another quarter of an hour. Even Emma was pleased that he would stay, for she was beginning to feel that a family party might be the worst of all parties; and the others were delighted.

"What's your game?" cried he, as they stood round the table.

"Speculation, I believe," said Elizabeth. "My sister recommends it, and I fancy we all like it; I know *you* do, Tom."

"It is the only round game played at Croydon now," said Mrs Robert; "we never think of any other. I am glad it is a favourite with you."

"Oh! me!" said Tom. "Whatever you decide on will be a favourite with *me*. I have had some pleasant hours at speculation in my time; but I have not been in the way of it for a long while. Vingt-un is the game at Osborne Castle. I have played nothing but vingt-un of late. You would be astonished to hear the noise we make there—the fine old lofty drawing-room rings again. Lady Osborne sometimes declares she cannot hear herself speak. Lord Osborne enjoys it famously—he makes the best dealer without exception that I ever beheld—such quickness and spirit! he lets nobody dream over their cards. I wish you could see him overdraw himself on both his own cards—it is worth anything in the world!"

"Dear me!" cried Margaret, "why should not we play vingt-un? I think it is a much better game than speculation. I cannot say I am very fond of speculation."

Mrs Robert offered not another word in support of the game. She was quite vanquished, and the fashions of Osborne Castle carried it over the fashions of Croydon.

"Do you see much of the Parsonage family

at the Castle, Mr Musgrave?" said Emma, as they were taking their seats.

"Oh! yes; they are almost always there. Mrs Blake is a nice, little, good-humoured woman; she and I are sworn friends; and Howard's a very gentlemanlike good sort of fellow! You are not forgotten, I can assure you, by any of the party. I fancy you must have a little cheek-glowing now and then, Miss Emma. Were you not rather warm last Saturday about nine or ten o'clock in the evening? I will tell you how it was—I see you are dying to know. Says Howard to Lord Osborne——"

At this interesting moment he was called on by the others to regulate the game, and determine some disputable point; and his attention was so totally engaged in the business, and afterwards by the course of the game, as never to revert to what he had been saying before; and Emma, though suffering a good deal from curiosity, dared not remind him.

He proved a very useful addition at their table. Without him it would have been a party of such very near relations as could have felt little interest, and perhaps maintained little complaisance, but his presence gave variety and secured good manners. He was, in fact, excellently qualified to shine at a round game; and few situations made him appear to greater advantage. He played with spirit, and had a great deal to say; and though with no wit himself, could sometimes make use of the wit of an absent friend, and had a lively way of retailing a common-

place, or saying a mere nothing, that had great effect at a card-table. The ways and good jokes of Osborne Castle were now added to his ordinary means of entertainment; he repeated the smart sayings of one lady, detailed the oversights of another, and indulged them even with a copy of Lord Osborne's overdrawing himself on both cards.

The clock struck nine while he was thus agreeably occupied; and when Nanny came in with her master's basin of gruel, he had the pleasure of observing to Mr Watson that he should leave him at supper while he went home to dinner himself. The carriage was ordered to the door, and no entreaties for his staying longer could now avail; for he well knew that if he stayed he would have to sit down to supper in less than ten minutes, which to a man whose heart had been long fixed on calling his next meal a dinner, was quite insupportable. On finding him determined to go, Margaret began to wink and nod at Elizabeth to ask him to dinner for the following day; and Elizabeth, at last, not able to resist hints which her own hospitable social temper more than half seconded, gave the invitation—"Would he give Robert the meeting, they should be very happy."

"With the greatest pleasure," was his first reply. In a moment afterwards, "That is, if I can possibly get here in time; but I shoot with Lord Osborne, and therefore must not engage. You will not think of me unless you see me." And so he departed, delighted in the uncertainty in which he had left it.

CHAPTER X

MARGARET, in the joy of her heart under circumstances which she chose to consider as peculiarly propitious, would willingly have made a confidante of Emma when they were alone for a short time the next morning, and had proceeded so far as to say, "The young man who was here last night, my dear Emma, and returns to-day, is more interesting to me than perhaps you may be aware—" but Emma, pretending to understand nothing extraordinary in the words, made some very inapplicable reply, and jumping up, ran away from a subject which was odious to her. As Margaret would not allow a doubt to be repeated of Musgrave's coming to dinner, preparations were made for his entertainment much exceeding what had been deemed necessary the day before; and taking the office of superintendence entirely from her sister, she was half the morning in the kitchen herself directing and scolding.

After a great deal of indifferent cooking and anxious suspense, however, they were obliged to sit down without their guest. Tom Musgrave never came; and Margaret was at no pains to conceal her vexation under the disappointment, or repress the peevishness of her temper. The peace of the party for the remainder of that day and the whole of the next, which comprised the length of

Robert and Jane's visit, was continually invaded by her fretful displeasure and querulous attacks. Elizabeth was the usual object of both. Margaret had just respect enough for her brother's and sister's opinion to behave properly by *them*, but Elizabeth and the maids could never do right; and Emma, whom she seemed no longer to think about, found the continuance of the gentle voice beyond calculation short. Eager to be as little among them as possible, Emma was delighted with the alternative of sitting above with her father, and warmly entreated to be his constant companion each evening; and as Elizabeth loved company of any kind too well not to prefer being below at all risks, as she had rather talk of Croydon with Jane, with every interruption of Margaret's perverseness, than sit with only her father, who frequently could not endure talking at all, the affair was so settled, as soon as she could be persuaded to believe it no sacrifice on her sister's part. To Emma the change was most acceptable and delightful. Her father, if ill, required little more than gentleness and silence, and, being a man of sense and education, was, if able to converse, a welcome companion. In *his* chamber Emma was at peace from the dreadful mortifications of unequal society and family discord; from the immediate endurance of hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded conceit, and wrong-headed folly, engrafted on an untoward disposition. She still suffered from them in the contemplation of their existence, in memory and in prospect, but for the moment she ceased to be tortured by their effects.

She was at leisure ; she could read and think, though her situation was hardly such as to make reflection very soothing. The evils arising from the loss of her uncle were neither trifling nor likely to lessen ; and when thought had been freely indulged in contrasting the past and the present, the employment of mind and dissipation of unpleasant ideas which only reading could produce, made her thankfully turn to a book.

The change in her home society and style of life, in consequence of the death of one friend and the imprudence of another, had indeed been striking. From being the first object of hope and solicitude to an uncle who had formed her mind with the care of a parent, and of tenderness to an aunt whose amiable temper had delighted to give her every indulgence, from being the life and spirit of a house where all had been comfort and elegance, and the expected heiress of an easy independence, she was become of importance to no one—a burden on those whose affections she could not expect, an addition in a house already overstocked, surrounded by inferior minds, with little chance of domestic comfort, and as little hope of future support. It was well for her that she was naturally cheerful, for the change had been such as might have plunged weak spirits in despondence.

She was very much pressed by Robert and Jane to return with them to Croydon, and had some difficulty in getting a refusal accepted, as they thought too highly of their own kindness and situation to suppose the offer could appear in a less

advantageous light to anybody else. Elizabeth gave them her interest, though evidently against her own, in privately urging Emma to go.

“You do not know what you refuse, Emma,” said she, “nor what you have to bear at home. I would advise you by all means to accept the invitation; there is always something lively going on at Croydon; you will be in company almost every day, and Robert and Jane will be very kind to you. As for me, I shall be no worse off without you than I have been used to be; but poor Margaret’s disagreeable ways are new to *you*, and they would vex you more than you think for, if you stay at home.”

Emma was of course uninfluenced, except to greater esteem for Elizabeth, by such representations, and the visitors departed without her.

CHAPTER XI

THE following morning Margaret proposed to Emma that they should walk. Emma was glad to find some improvement in her sister's spirits and temper, and was willing to relieve the rest of the household of the fear of a relapse. Accordingly the two sisters set out. They took the road towards the town, Margaret saying nothing as to their object, and Emma making no enquiry. It did not occur to her that her sister had other motives than the wish for air and exercise.

"I have hardly had time to talk to you, Emma, since I came home, but the fact is that Jane is so fond of me that, when we are together, she can seldom spare me for ten minutes. She is an amazing clever woman, and one of the best judges of character and manners I ever saw."

This seemed rather to indicate the smallness of Margaret's acquaintance than the correctness of Mrs Robert's judgment. Emma, however, made no objection, and Margaret hurried on to a yet more agreeable subject.

"I am sure, Emma, you must be struck with Tom Musgrave's manners. Is he not the most pleasing young man you ever met?"

"I cannot say that I admire him at all," replied Emma.

“Not admire him!” cried Margaret. “That must be because he did not admire you. He did not dance with you at the ball I know. I dare say too, he was not in spirits; if I had been there it would have been different. If you knew him as well as I do, and had received so much attention from him, and knew what he thought of yourself as I do, you would see him with very different eyes.”

Emma saw no necessity to reply, and Margaret continued to talk of Tom Musgrave’s qualities and affection for herself without more encouragement than her own pleasure in the topic. She was only checked at last by the sound of horses.

“Heavens!” she cried, looking back, “there he is coming, and some others with him, all on horseback. Who can they be? I did not expect him so soon.”

“Were you expecting him?” asked Emma, with surprise. “Is it to be supposed that we walked this way to meet him?”

“Well, and where is the harm if we did? I wish you would look at the two gentlemen, and tell me if you know who they are.”

Emma felt that the evil of the situation need not be increased by any display of curiosity, and Margaret had to drop behind and admire the hedgerow to gain a glimpse of the horsemen.

“I declare I believe it is Lord Osborne and Mr Howard with Tom. How tiresome! Tom will never stop when he is with Lord Osborne. How very provoking!”

Emma half wished herself at home, but the sound

of the sharp-trotting horses overtaking them might have been very pleasant had she not already determined otherwise.

The gentlemen drew up beside the high narrow footpath, on which the sisters were walking. Lord Osborne dismounted and, leading his horse, walked by the side of Emma, while Tom was off in a moment in ever-faithful imitation, only to find himself exposed to the appealing glances and soft whispers of Margaret. Emma saw with some concern that Mr Howard remained on horseback, and only acknowledged their presence by a formal bow.

Lord Osborne meanwhile must be attended to, as he seemed to be doing his best to please, and she could not but be entertained by the air of deference and attention with which the dashing Tom Musgrave interposed from behind to applaud his lordship's remarks and confirm all his statements.

Thus they walked to a bend in the road, where a lane turning off seemed to lead towards home. Emma turned to her sister, saying :

"Surely this should be our way home."

"I am sure I am quite ready to go," said Margaret, whose mortification at Tom's neglect was only too apparent.

"But I thought you were come here to see the hounds throw off," said Lord Osborne to Emma ; "and what is the use of going home before you reach the covert ?"

Emma protested that she had not known where the hunt was to meet.

"Still you may as well come on now you are so

near. My sister and Miss Carr are to be there, and I want to introduce you to them."

Emma expressed the opinion that Miss Osborne might well be more surprised than pleased at such an intrusion.

"No, indeed; on my honour, my sister wishes to know you. Tom Musgrave knows what she said last night."

He looked over his shoulder at his friend, but left no time for more than a simple assent from Tom.

"I believe I was wrong in what I said," he continued. "I want to introduce my sister to you. Is that right?"

Emma could not quite control a smile.

"I am much obliged to you, my lord, but indeed I cannot comply with your request, and as Miss Osborne is not expecting to meet us to-day, she will experience no disappointment."

More than ordinary firmness was required on Emma's part before the young lord of the manor could be brought to see that her denial was not of a nature to be overruled. But at last the two young men had ridden on, and Emma and an angry Margaret were walking in the opposite direction. Then Emma made a movement which she regretted almost before it was made. Recollecting that Mr Howard had smiled once and spoken not at all, she turned her head, only to find Lord Osborne more than half turned in the saddle, and on the instant she fancied, but could not be sure, that Mr Howard turned too.

Margaret was not accustomed to lag behind her neighbours in the general surprise excited by the words, deeds and deportment of others. Now, when a younger sister, after a few days' residence at home, appeared so ready not only to flout Tom Musgrave, who had hitherto been the only connecting link with the Castle, but even to flout the Castle itself, Margaret, having exhausted her vocabulary day after day on the surprising doings of Miss A. and the amazing gentility of Mr B., may be pardoned for being for once at a loss for words. A life-habit however will reassert itself, even at the age of twenty-five, and she was soon eagerly expressing astonishment, and thence came to the stage of enquiry.

"How many times have you met Lord Osborne?"

Emma replied that he had been present at the Assembly Ball.

"Yes, I know you saw him there, but you did not dance even with Tom Musgrave."

Emma reminded her that the gentlemen had waited on their father after the ball.

"Yes, but to dismount and walk with us! Upon my word!" Further exclamation was checked by the reappearance of Mr Howard who, all in a moment, overtook them, dismounted, and was walking by the side of Emma.

"I thought you were going to hunt," she said.

Mr Howard replied that he had only ridden out for pleasure, not for so important and imperative a business as fox-hunting. It was evident that he

considered walking with the Miss Watsons quite as pleasant as riding, and that he was in no hurry to remount.

“Will you allow my sister to do herself the honour of calling on you?” he said presently. “Your kindness to her little boy has quite captivated her, and Charles is as anxious as herself to carry on the acquaintance. She has been ill since the Assembly, or the offer would have been made before.”

Emma, with heightened colour, confessed that it would give her great pleasure to become better acquainted both with Charles and his mother.

“I could not but hesitate to make my application,” he continued, “having so lately heard that of my pupil rejected. You will not, I hope, really refuse Miss Osborne’s overtures.”

Emma after a momentary hesitation replied that in the County of Shropshire it was on occasion thought unwise to attach full value to the assertions of young men, and she surmised it might be the same in the County of Surrey.

“You do less than justice both to yourself and to my friends,” said Mr Howard gently. “I assure you the wish was in truth expressed by Miss Osborne.”

Emma did not reply, but she wondered if her feeling of gratification arose from the wish ascribed to Miss Osborne or the solicitude shown by Mr Howard. Margaret seized the opportunity of the pause, and leaning past her sister, questioned Mr Howard.

“Is it really true, Mr Howard, that Miss Carr is so very beautifully fair?”

“She certainly is fair,” he replied, astonished at the question.

“Mr Musgrave is a great deal at the Castle, is he not?”

Mr Howard replied that he was.

“I do not wonder at it. He must be a great favourite with the ladies. I should think his manners must recommend him everywhere.”

“He is more intimate with Lord Osborne than with the others of the family,” observed Mr Howard, with a suppressed smile, which Emma construed into amusement at the idea of Miss Osborne’s admiring her brother’s hanger-on; and she silently diverted herself with fancying the probable degree of esteem which Tom Musgrave’s complaisance and flattery would win for him.

CHAPTER XII

“UPON my word, Elizabeth,” said Margaret, as they entered the parlour, “I should like to know what Emma has done to get such fine friends. She has such amazing luck. I suppose I have been to twenty assemblies and never was a bit the nearer knowing Lord Osborne or any of his set, and not for want of a hint, but you know how obstinate Tom can be. How Emma managed it I cannot think.”

Emma, who knew herself innocent of any manœuvre, and who feared that the conversation might tend in a direction whither she had hardly allowed her own thoughts to stray, did not remain to hear more, but went upstairs to her father. As she closed the door, she heard just enough of Elizabeth’s kind reply to feel thankful for her intervention.

“It is simply that Emma is good-natured and pretty,” said Elizabeth, laying down her needlework.

“Emma is not the first pretty girl who has been seen in those rooms, I believe, and I should like to know what good-nature has to do with it.”

“It made her offer to dance with little Charles Blake, and so please his mother and uncle. That was her kindness and good-nature.”

“No, it was not, it was because she was so lucky as to sit next the boy; if she had been at the other end of the room, all the good-nature in the world would have been of no use. It was all her good luck.”

“And if you had sat next to him the whole evening, should you have thought of offering to be his partner?” enquired Elizabeth.

“Very likely not. I hate dancing with boys, but Emma likes children, which just proves what I was saying, that she has all the good fortune. But I do not understand how Emma became so well acquainted with Lord Osborne.”

“And I cannot at all comprehend what makes your head so full of the Osbornes this morning,” replied Elizabeth.

“Why, we met them all this morning, and first there was Lord Osborne walking and talking with Emma, and then Mr Howard. There never was anything like it. He came right up to the garden gate before he left us.”

“Do you mean Lord Osborne?” cried Elizabeth in astonishment.

Margaret explained, but with such ill-humour that Elizabeth, curious and unsatisfied, ran up after Emma to ascertain the truth from her.

Emma had quitted her father's room, and was standing by the window in the room she shared with Elizabeth. Despite the pleasure of Mr Howard's attentions, her spirits were not good. Margaret was not such a walking companion as she had been used to. She had been much with her uncle, a well-read man of broad views, and she had been accustomed to the enjoyment of sharing the experiences of a cultivated mind. She had been happy, too, in many hours of solitude, and family life at Stanton with its incessant calls on her attention

and good-humour was too great a change to be as yet agreeable. She had, however, a real regard for Elizabeth, and her entrance, while it necessitated the rousing of her spirits, did not irk them. Elizabeth was soon in possession of all that had passed, and of as much as she could comprehend of Emma's reasons for declining the introduction to Miss Osborne. This was more than she could have understood a month earlier. Her intimacy with Emma had shown her that there were people whose imagination was not bounded by the Castle, and whose hopes were not centred in D——

"Well, I am less proud than you, Emma. I should think it very fine to be introduced to Miss Osborne. After all, you mean to let Mrs Blake, visit you. Where is the difference?"

"Surely, Elizabeth, you must yourself see the difference. Mr Howard and his sister are in our own rank of life, though their intimacy at the Castle gives them more consequence. There would be no condescension on their part, and no obligation incurred by me which a return visit will not repay."

"Well, I wish I knew what day they would come," said Miss Watson; "for we could sit in the drawing-room, and not cover the sofa and carpet."

"But, my dearest sister, I hope it will not be the only visit they pay, and we cannot always be sitting in state to receive them. Let us choose to begin as perforce we must continue."

"You are very odd, Emma. I do not understand you at all," was all Elizabeth could say.

A combination of gratitude in Mrs Blake, en-

thusiasm in Charles, a something in Mr Howard, a fair morning and an old pony-chaise brought the party from Wickstead to call on the Miss Watsons at Stanton on the following Monday.

Elizabeth and Margaret were sitting together when they were announced. Greetings were exchanged, and Emma was named. Elizabeth looked an enquiry at Margaret, but Margaret was too well satisfied with her position to notice, and Elizabeth, after lengthy apologies, was obliged herself to go in search of Emma.

There is a certain freedom in being alone with strangers, and Margaret took full advantage of it. Old wit is new, or may be, and will almost certainly be accepted as new. Margaret, gentle and drawling, was by turns the admired of the town of D—— for Mr Howard, the would-be confidante for Mrs Blake, and could doubtless have been something appropriate for Master Blake if he had not checkmated her by asking for Emma. He stood by his mother's side, earnestly regarding the top of his hat, and drawing figures on the beaver with his fingers, until the entrance of the two other young ladies, when he looked up all animation as Emma greeted him as her "partner at the ball."

Why Emma, without being in any way striking, and without the wish of appearing so, should become the centre of the circle of interest is a question that admits of many answers. To Mr Howard she was fast becoming the centre of many things. For Mrs Blake there could be only one centre, her children, but Emma had allied herself to

Charles by word and look. Charles's thoughts had revolved round her since she first took his hand; while Elizabeth was pleased to see that she had on her spotted muslin, and Margaret, noting afresh her brown skin, thought with complaisance of her own fairness.

A moment afterwards Mr Watson entered the room, to the surprise of his daughters, who should have realised that even much-pampered gout might be relieved by the sound of Mr Howard's voice.

It was Emma who rolled her father's chair into position, Emma who arranged his footstool, who drew the curtain, placed the screen and laid his spectacles and snuff-box within his reach, and nothing of this escaped Mr Howard's notice.

When Mr Watson had put on his spectacles, he surveyed the company and, turning to Mr Howard, asked who was that nice young woman talking to Elizabeth. Mr Howard replied that she was his sister. Mr Watson apologised for not recognising a lady whom he had never seen before. It seemed a strange thing to him, he said, that he should not be presented to ladies in his own house, and Elizabeth well knew the difficulty he would now experience in rising and crossing the room to pay his respects.

Elizabeth had tried to do what was proper, but at quite the most impossible moment, and it must be in doubt whether the apology, which she was now trying to make, would have attracted any more attention, had not Mrs Blake rendered apology unnecessary and annoyance ridiculous by crossing

the room and taking her brother's seat by Mr Watson. In the general rearrangement, Mr Howard was soon addressing himself to Emma, Elizabeth sat looking on in happy hospitality, while for Margaret a welcome diversion was caused by the entry of Tom Musgrave.

Tom, admired by at least three-fourths of the young ladies of the neighbourhood, was mildly disliked by Mr Watson, and caused him a more than mild annoyance, but this is the less surprising when we remember that the young ladies would have disliked three-fourths of everything that Mr Watson found tolerable. Mr Watson was reasonably uncivil, and Tom quickly found that the only person anxious to hear how he had won a wager off Lord Osborne that morning was the one to whom he did not care to tell it; and soon Margaret had the disappointment of hearing him say :

"Well, I must be going, Mr Watson, for I have an engagement. I promised to meet Fred Simpson and Beauclere and another fellow, so I must be on my way. There are not many men within reach of my curricule who will buy or sell a dog without getting the advantage of my opinion. These are monstrous good fellows, and must not be kept waiting. Great friends of Osborne's, I assure you."

Nobody but Margaret opposed his intention, and he took himself off. As the sound of the curricule wheels lessened, Mr Watson observed :

"A foolish young man ! Did he say some word of sense, I should never know it. I have long withheld my attention."

CHAPTER XIII

THE question next day was how soon the visit could with propriety be returned. Mr Watson supplied the answer by saying that on Wednesday only could the horse be spared. The next question might have been settled with equal dispatch if Mr Watson had spoken first, but it often pleased him to speak last. To Margaret there was no difficulty; she would drive Emma to Wickstead, she was sure that Emma could not drive. Emma was convinced that Elizabeth must go. It was a first visit, and Elizabeth was the eldest. It would be more proper for Elizabeth to go. Elizabeth was herself anxious to go, and so was easily persuaded of its importance, but Emma must go; the visit had been paid specially to her.

"But then I cannot go," Margaret complained. "Why am I to be left out? If Elizabeth goes because she is the eldest, I have the best right to go too when Pen is away, for I am older than Emma."

"Would not the chair hold three?" asked Emma. "Margaret is so slight, and I am not large. I am sure we could all sit."

"I dare say you could," said Mr Watson, "but you would all have to sit in the stable-yard, for the old mare would not draw you." No! if Margaret

wants to go, she must wait till next time. If you pay visits at all, you shall pay them properly."

Margaret's subsequent ill-humour had little effect on Miss Watson; she had borne with it too much and too long; but Emma found that the projected visit must be paid for, and hoped that it might be worth the price.

Mr Watson, looking out of his window next morning, saw a sprinkling of snow, and signs of a cold wind, felt one twinge of gout and feared more. Elizabeth knew enough about the horse and chair to shiver in anticipation. Emma, who had run to the window, felt some apprehension. Margaret's room was as cold as any, but *she* felt considerable satisfaction as she looked out, for the choice before her sisters was either a very cold drive, or a thoroughly disappointing fireside. There was some discussion at breakfast, but failing a decision from Mr Watson, Emma's wishes prevailed. They started, and the snow, which had threatened, began to fall, though not until they were in sight of Osborne Castle and the Parsonage of Wickstead.

Elizabeth was far from comfortable. Added to the cold was a sense of nervousness and inferiority which she had seldom before felt. There had been too little intercourse to arouse such a feeling, but now the Castle loomed behind the Parsonage, and Miss Osborne behind Mrs Blake. She wished herself at home. Emma wished only to find the Parsonage family at home, and her fear was the more practical and well-founded one of a heavy snowfall, which would make their return journey even more

unpleasant. The entrance gate, the short approach the maid-servant, the hall, all appeared exceedingly neat, and even a little disconcerting to Elizabeth. but to Emma it was her father's house and surroundings which had seemed so unusual.

On being admitted into the parlour, they found Mrs Blake alone. She received them with cordiality, and they had been seated but a very short time before their hostess was enquiring what she might order for their comfort. In spite of all denials, a tray was brought in, and hot wine and cake were found to be indeed refreshing. The visitors *should* have been satisfied. A warm fire, refreshment and pleasant company *should* satisfy after a cold drive. It must be admitted, however, that no sooner was Emma warmed and comforted than, like the rest of mankind, she was conscious of wanting more. She had, however, hardly time to reprove herself for the wish before he was in the room, and informing them that their horse was in the stable, and their chair in the shed. In the intervals of conversing with Mrs Blake, Elizabeth noted with admiration with what ease Emma chatted with the tutor and friend of Lord Osborne.

At the end of half an hour the sisters, after glancing at one another, rose to go. Mr Howard walked to the window and declared their departure to be quite impossible.

"The snow is getting quite deep," he said, "and the wind is rising."

Elizabeth replied that this made their speedy departure the more necessary. Mrs Blake, with

cordial urgency, opposed any immediate decision, and was of the opinion that after dinner the weather would be more propitious. Elizabeth objected that by that time it would be dark.

"Which," said Mr Howard, "altogether settles the matter. You must resign yourselves to stay the night, and I will dispatch a messenger to Stanton to bring peace of mind to Mr Watson."

All were now at the window, and the prospect of driving and deepening snow made Mrs Blake's next words welcome.

"There is no sort of difficulty. I can provide everything. Indeed, my dear Miss Watson, it is not to be thought of. How can you suppose that we could go back to our fire, and imagine you driving such a distance on such an afternoon?"

There were some protests, but the brother and sister were agreed, and all opposition was overborne.

"This," opined Mr Howard, "is the way in which all such pleasant calls should end. Now we can be really comfortable."

CHAPTER XIV

ALL settled down, and four out, of the five were, as Mr Howard had predicted, truly comfortable. Elizabeth had two causes of disquiet. Firstly, she was in a house of strangers, where even more alarming strangers might be announced at any hour. Secondly, she was not at home, and had good reason from past experience to doubt whether Mr Watson and his daughter Margaret could, or would, dine together with any degree of comfort, the more so as she feared that the dinner prepared without her supervision would not conduce to their good-humour. However, no one was announced; a pleasant visit was paid to the nursery; dinner, despite the vicinity of Osborne Castle, was at an hour no later than that to which they were accustomed, and afterwards, when they were settled in the parlour, helping Mrs Blake to make small silk bags, which Mr Howard and Charles filled with pot-pourri, she felt almost at her ease.

Charles enquired of his uncle as to how long the storm would last, and on being answered seemed for once to doubt Mr Howard's judgment, having for his own opinion that the storm might well last a week, and that it would be so pleasant to keep the Miss Watsons. Turning to Emma he demanded :

“Would it not be delightful?”

Emma hesitated, and was saved from further confusion by Mrs Blake saying :

“ We will keep them as long as we can, Charles.”

Elizabeth, having gained some degree of confidence, felt the need of establishing it, and was beginning to fix it on her mind that no one could call in such weather, when a loud knock at the door made her certain of the worst. But no denizen of the Castle followed the maid-servant, who brought only a note for Mr Howard. After glancing at it, he promptly sat down to the writing-table, wrote, folded and sealed a letter, and handed it to the maid. Then, turning to the party, he said :

• “ A note from Lady Osborne to invite, or shall I say require, my presence this evening to make up her card-table. • I have declined.”

“ How glad I am ! ” cried his sister. “ Such a night to ask you out, though only across the park ! But the Miss Watsons’ company affords a sufficient apology even to Lady Osborne.”

“ It is a sufficient one to myself,” said Mr Howard.

“ We hear virtue has its own reward,” said Emma, “ and your hospitality to us is now repaid in kind. You would not let us encounter the snow, and it is but just that you should be spared yourself.”

“ Well, Edward, I should be glad if you had a living in the next county ; for you must know, Miss Watson, that the Castle is too near for our convenience. We are under obligations which neither party can forget, and Edward is compelled to sacrifice a great deal of time to the whims of the

great lady. You have no idea how exacting she is, and if my brother were not one of the best-tempered of men, we never could go on as well as we do."

Here was food for wonder to Elizabeth. The Osbornes, though noble, were not perfect; the Howards, with their good house, income, and connections, had like others their own grievances, and cherished those hopes of improving their lot which form the principal charm of life to more than half the world.

"You must remember," said Mr Howard, "that Lady Osborne presented me to the living, and certainly means kindly."

"That is quite the right thing for you to say, but neither gallantry nor gratitude have the same claim on me. She certainly means kindly—to herself—and to others when it is convenient."

"No, you cannot mean what you say."

"Indeed I do," replied she smiling. "Does she suppose you altogether indifferent to cold, and pleased to encounter such a storm?"

"If we were fifty miles from the Castle, Clara, you would then notice the inconvenience we should suffer from the loss of many comforts which it affords us, as you now notice the inconvenience of being distant only half a mile."

"We might not have so much game; Miss Osborne would not give me flowers; we should not go to assemblies in their coach. On the other hand, I should not be so plagued by our best maid marrying their groom next month, because the 'Osborne Arms' will then be vacant. Nor would

the laundress tell me, when I complain of her clear starching, that she had always helped in my Lady's laundry, and the housekeeper had been perfectly satisfied. And then we should not have to decipher her ladyship's handwriting, which is a labour itself."

"Does Lady Osborne write so often?" enquired Elizabeth.

"She finds occasion to write to my brother several times a week," replied Mrs Blake, "and the messages and good advice for me are included—but it is of the quality of her handwriting that I complain. It is hardly to be separated one word from another: I was surprised at the ease with which Edward read this last note."

Mr Howard explained that having captured the words "card-table" and "this evening," the rest had been simple.

"Perhaps," hazarded Emma, "Lady Osborne has the gout in her fingers. I have heard that many old people are so afflicted, and I knew one old lady——"

Emma never gained for her old acquaintance the sympathy of the Parsonage parlour, for Mrs Blake was laughing with her hand to her side, Mr Howard joined in, and Elizabeth laughed too, without in the least knowing why. Charles only was silent and puzzled. Mrs Blake controlled herself.

"No, no, Miss Emma, gout and old age will not do at all."

"But," Charles asserted, "she is an old lady. She has a big son."

“Lord Osborne is not very big, Charles,” said his mother with a smile.

“Indeed, I think Lord Osborne a very fine young man, and I am sure Emma does too. Do you not Emma?” interposed Elizabeth, who had only half-understood what was going on, but who could not hear Lord Osborne’s name without recalling his admiration for Emma.

Mr Howard gave Emma an enquiring glance, and thereafter there was a certain coldness and restraint in his manner of addressing her which puzzled and rather vexed her. It was not, however, shaken off during the rest of the evening, and only lessened by his being persuaded to read aloud to them. In this manner the remainder of the evening was spent.

CHAPTER XV

THE morning was fine, but so much snow had fallen as to render travelling a matter of conjecture.

Elizabeth found that absence and a good night's sleep had lessened her fears for her father. Emma was too happy to have fears for anyone. The breakfast hour was pleasant. As the ladies were sitting together afterwards, without announcement, and so without giving opportunity for Elizabeth to be fearful before the event, the door half-opened, and Lord Osborne's head appeared.

"May I come in?" said he. "You look very comfortable." Permission was readily given, and having said what was civil to Mrs Blake and Elizabeth, he sat down and remarked to Emma that he had heard of their being snowed up there last night.

"Yes, my mother *would* know who it was keeping Howard, and so I asked the servant, and I am to give you my sister's compliments, or love, or something of that nature, and as soon as the road is made possible, she will come and see you."

"My sister and I will be very happy, if we are still of the party when Miss Osborne calls on Mrs Blake," replied Emma.

The announcement gave Mrs Blake no particular concern. Elizabeth's feelings were exactly what

might be expected. Emma was embarrassed ; she knew they might soon be away, and was conscious that she desired no addition to their party.

"It's not such bad walking either as you would think," said Lord Osborne to nobody, and in answer to nothing, "and the walk down here is screened from the wind, but you would be surprised to see the drifts. It will be impossible for you to get through the lanes to-day, Miss Watson."

"We do not intend that they should make the attempt," said their hostess. She then tried to resume her conversation with Elizabeth, which had been of real interest to her. As Miss Watson became hardened to Lord Osborne's presence, her faculties returned, and she was soon almost as well able to advise Mrs Blake about her chickens, as she had been before there was a peer in the room.

Lord Osborne had little to say, but seemed to find pleasure in looking at Emma, who employed herself in the arrangement of Charles' scrap-book.

The door-bell rang towards noon, and Miss Osborne was announced, coming, as she declared at once, to call on Miss Emma Watson.

She was small and elegant, quite pretty enough to be called beautiful in consideration of her birth. She talked for some time with animation, as if it were a relief to escape from the Castle to the unrestrained warmth and good-humour of the Parsonage.

"Where is your brother to-day, Mrs Blake?" she asked. "Is he afraid of a scolding? My

mother was sadly disappointed last night, but I think he was to be excused." This with a smile which included the two Miss Watsons. "I must see Mr Howard, however, as I am charged with a message from my mother to invite you all to come and dine at the Castle this evening, and I was particularly enjoined to obtain an acceptance from all."

Elizabeth had ventured, endured, and in some measure succeeded, but now felt that if achievement led only to so dire a prospect, it were better to have stayed at home occupied between the kitchen and the parlour. Miss Osborne's proposal was followed by a short, hesitating silence. Mrs Blake looked at Elizabeth. It was strange and unexpected that Miss Watson should experience a sense of relief at having no suitable gown for an occasion. Striving to conceal the eagerness of her refusal, she said :

"I am afraid we cannot have the pleasure—do ourselves the honour, I should say, but indeed we are quite unprepared. We have no dresses, and even——" and she stopped embarrassed.

Miss Osborne looked surprised, and replied : "Surely that is no real difficulty. We shall make no objection to your coming as you are. You will be doing us a favour. You cannot imagine how dull we are. Mamma dozes over a fire-screen, and Miss Carr and I sit and look at each other."

Lord Osborne edged his chair closer to Emma, and in a low tone pressed the request that his sister had made.

"Do come. You look too good-natured to

say no. I am sure you must be monstrous obliging."

Emma shook her head, and tried not to smile.

"And as to what your sister says about dresses, that's nonsense you know. I don't mean that she talks nonsense, but it is foolish to care about dress. You look very nice, you always do, and we don't in the least mind about your gown. My mother and sister have such quantities of fine clothes themselves, that, depend on it, they will not the least care about seeing more."

It was evident to Miss Osborne that the ladies wished to discuss this question among themselves. She therefore chatted good-naturedly on some indifferent topics, and took her leave, promising that, if they decided in favour of the Castle, the coach would be sent to fetch them. She persuaded her brother to return with her, which was a particular relief to Emma. Hardly was the house-door closed on them, when Elizabeth exclaimed :

"Dear Mrs Blake, do tell me what we had better do. I am sure I would much rather refuse if we may, but then it might not be thought right, and I own if I were not so frightened, I should like to see the inside of the Castle?"

Mrs Blake advised acceptance, and reminded Elizabeth that she and her sister would not be wholly among strangers, as Mr Howard as well as herself would be of the party.

Elizabeth, whilst admitting that this was much, expressed her feelings by saying :

"But you cannot prevent Lady Osborne from

seeing us." At this moment Mr Howard, who had been found by a servant at a cottage at some little distance, entered the room. He had met Miss Osborne and her brother as they were leaving the house, and accompanied her part of the way. As he spoke he looked at Emma, who felt herself blush in the most shocking manner. A dire suspicion had come into her mind. Mr Howard had been walking with Miss Osborne. He began to urge acceptance, and her fears were confirmed. Mr Howard had his own anxieties. He rightly connected her blushes with the name of Osborne, but had no more thought of the sister than Emma had of the brother. They were equally anxious and equally mistaken.

Miss Osborne, as she walked home, was able to view the situation more correctly. Her wishes were decidedly though calmly involved. A marriage between Mr Howard and Emma Watson would be exactly to her liking, and would remove her apprehension of having Mr Howard for a father-in-law. Not that she had any dislike for Mr Howard, but she felt the impropriety of Lady Osborne's making so unequal a match, both as to age and situation, and she could not be blind to her mother's increasing partiality for the young man.

A letter of acceptance followed Miss Osborne after a short interval.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Osbornes' carriage travelled half a mile empty, half a mile full, the Miss Watsons were in the Castle, they had entered the drawing-room, and Elizabeth had not only curtsied to Lady Osborne, but had had the curtsy acknowledged. ; After a short interval of general conversation, Lady Osborne invited Mr Howard to look over a list of parishioners considered worthy of benefits, and then was unable to find it. Having apportioned the blame between "someone" and "the servants," she was able to converse on what appeared to be more lively subjects, and was soon nodding, and smiling, and reproving, marking the reproofs with taps on the hand with the fire-screen. The ladies, meanwhile, conversed among themselves, until the entry of Miss Osborne and her brother, followed by that of Miss Carr, completed the party without disturbing Lady Osborne.

The dinner was excessively dull for the visitors, a little less so than usual for Miss Osborne and Miss Carr, and for Lady Osborne and her son full of satisfaction.

It was probably the busiest hour of the day for Lady Osborne. She carved the principal dish, and in recommending everything on the table to her guests had some real feelings of hospitality. She

had a healthy appetite, had much to say to Mr Howard, and still made time for many glances at her reflection in the mirror behind her son.

Lord Osborne, who never said much, and almost nothing before his mother, was fully occupied between his dinner and the contemplation of Emma. In her opinion, all that could redeem the party from the charge of stupidity was a short conversation with Mr Howard, and some lively moments with Miss Osborne. Elizabeth was much more likely to enjoy it in retrospect than in the anxious present.

After tea the party sat down to *vingt-et-un*, which might have been more lively had it not been for the great desire of Lady Osborne to win, and the great inclination of the rest of the party to yawn. Lady Osborne was a loser, and their yawns were suppressed, but this left the whole party without relief, until the moment of leave-taking came, when, in the enlivening bustle of departure, more pleasure was experienced than had been felt during the whole evening.

Lord Osborne watched Mr Howard as he helped Emma to wrap up and said suddenly :

“ I shall come and see you to-morrow.”

“ It seems warmer to-night,” Emma remarked. “ Do you not think we shall have a thaw ? Perhaps we may get home to-morrow.”

“ If the weather does not change til we wish it, we shall keep you a prisoner some days yet,” said Mr Howard with much cordiality.

A gentle “ Thank you ” was all Emma could reply. She wished to say more, but the carriage

was reached before she could decide on the words.

The drive home proved much more agreeable than the visit. All had some cause for satisfaction. If the Castle had proved dull, still the Miss Watsons had visited there, and that was much. Mr Howard's fears had been induced to slumber, and Mrs Blake was happily anticipating the sight of her children asleep. To Emma and Mr Howard the drive seemed very short, to Mrs Blake and Miss Watson it occupied just about the time which a half-mile drive usually does. The warm fire in the Parsonage parlour, cake, baked apples and lively discourse did much to redeem the occasion.

CHAPTER XVII

THE weather next morning was 'all that could be desired. More snow had fallen during the night, and there was a cutting wind. All seemed to point to the lovers being thrown together and the obvious happy results.

Now is the time when it should be discovered that Mr Howard owns a maniac wife ; that Emma was betrothed in her cradle to a distant cousin, or that either, or both, had taken vows of celibacy. I have, however, at this point nothing more sensational to record than a slight misunderstanding which, though it caused Mr Howard much uneasiness, only deepened his regard for Emma, and as she was completely unconscious of it, made upon her no impression whatever.

About noon a note was brought from Miss Osborne, reminding Emma of a wish expressed the night before of seeing the picture-gallery, and offering to show her round it, if Mr Howard would escort her to the Castle.

They were soon on their way. The air was exhilarating and the ground so slippery as to make it as necessary as it was agreeable for Mr Howard to offer his arm, and for Emma to accept it. The prospects were fine, and they did not hurry their walk, but enjoyed it to the utmost, even turning

aside from the direct ascent to gain a wider outlook. They reached the Castle at last, having taken only half an hour over a walk which could easily have been accomplished in ten minutes. To Emma, it had not been tedious, and to Mr. Howard, it had been at least thirty periods of varying emotions.

Miss Osborne greeted them with good-humour and civility, warmly pressing Emma's hand, and enquired with surprise how it happened that they had not met Lord Osborne. Mr. Howard replied that he had taken Miss Watson aside from the direct path to show her a particular view of the Castle. The matter was dismissed from the minds of every one, until such time as Lord Osborne might reappear, hot and disappointed, to hear the same tale, and think it very odd. Miss Osborne led the way to the gallery. Old castles do contain good pictures as well as bad, and here were a number that repaid attention. Miss Osborne stifled a yawn, failed to stifle a second, drifted to the window, recollected an important duty, and left them with apologies and recommendations.

The pictures did occupy them for a time. Mr. Howard knew something about them, and Emma was appreciative, but they, too, found themselves at a window, and to be seated side by side in the cushioned alcove seemed the most natural thing in the world. Some very happy minutes passed, ended on this occasion not by the intrusion of Tom Musgrave in person, but by the introduction of his name.

"I believe that you are acquainted with Mr Tom Musgrave?" remarked Mr Howard.

"Yes."

"He is not a person usually spoken of so concisely. If I put the question to five out of six of my acquaintance, they would exclaim with rapture—'He is charming! perfect! a pattern for all gentlemen!'"

"I understand that he is a great favourite," observed Emma.

"I have been used to consider him so perfect an example in everything relative to fashion," said Mr Howard gravely, "that when I wish to be particularly charming, I feel I should endeavour to copy him in the tying of my cravat."

"I am not sure that I should think anyone improved by copying Mr Tom Musgrave, but I have, I fear, a wicked prejudice against anyone who is considered universally agreeable."

"That is most discouraging. If to be universally agreeable is to be hated by you, I shall leave off attempting to be pleasant. What proportion of enemies will permit of some acquaintances and a few friends?"

"This requires some data for my calculations," she replied. "You must tell me to begin with, how many you have been in the habit of flattering daily."

"I have not thought that I exceeded the bounds of practical civility."

"I cannot believe you. But if you will not own to flattery, with how many do you consider yourself a particular favourite?"

"You must not call on me to be so very exact. I hear what the ladies say to me, but very little of what they say about me."

"You evade my question, Mr Howard."

"Seriously, Miss Watson, why do you feel so particular an enmity towards the general favourites of your sex?"

"Seriously, then, because I mistrust them."

"You believe they sacrifice truth to popularity. Is that not a severe reflection on the taste of women?" he asked.

"I did not mean it as such."

"Without exception, my acquaintances profess to hate flattery," he went on.

"And I confess to going a step farther. I dislike the flatterer," she replied.

"And by what scale do you measure to form a correct decision? Is your knowledge of your own merit so accurate that you can instantly separate truth from flattery, and apportion the credit or censure to the gentleman? Perhaps, though, one doubtful word is enough to condemn the whole!"

"I think, Mr Howard, I decide on the value of compliments more from the character of the giver than from my own. If a man or woman dares to speak a disagreeable truth, I cannot suspect them of an agreeable falsehood. Or, if they are as ready to praise the absent as to compliment those present, then I listen with pleasure."

"This would indeed be a check on conversation; not to praise those addressed and not to abuse those out of hearing," he exclaimed.

"You will not be serious. You speak of conversation, but you mean gossip and slander."

"True! Call it by its proper name of slander. When we speak of it as scandal no one of us thinks it much amiss."

"Most detestable of all," said Emma, with sudden vehemence born of a painful recollection, "is flattery from mercenary motives. To see a man, a young man, courting, flattering, cajoling a woman for her money. Hateful!"

Mr Howard looked at his companion with surprise. She certainly felt acutely what she had said. As he was perfectly ignorant of the circumstances of her aunt's marriage, an idea took possession of his mind that she alluded to himself and Lady Osborne. Though he knew himself innocent of what might deserve such condemnation, and had suffered as much from anxiety as from annoyance on the occasion of the dinner at the Castle, he could think of nothing that might be said, but stood up, hot and angry.

Emma rose too, and with an agitation which somewhat cooled his own, added: "I am ashamed, Mr Howard, of having spoken too bitterly. Pray forget what I said if possible. At least do not decide that I am an ill-natured person because I spoke so hastily."

An awkward pause ensued, which Emma ended by saying:

"It is almost dusk. Should we not be returning?"

"You are right," he said. "You will have other opportunities of viewing the gallery."

At that moment the door opened and Lord Osborne appeared. After paying his compliments, he observed :

"You must have a precious strong taste for pictures, Miss Watson, to remain in the gallery when it is too dark to see."

"We have stayed longer than we intended, my lord," said Emma.

"It is a mighty fine thing to have such a lot of pictures, with all the fine names tacked on to them. One or two I really like myself. There's one of some horses by somebody, and a Dutch painting of some dead game, which is so like, you would really think them all alive. Did you not notice it? Howard there knows all about them. He has the names, dates and all on the end of his tongue. Don't you find it a deuced bore to listen to it?"

"I think I am glad of the information."

"Well, I should be glad, too, of a piece of information. How the—— I mean how did I contrive to miss you as I was going down the straight path to the Parsonage?"

"Because we did not come up the straight path, my lord."

"Well, upon my honour, I *was* surprised when I got there to hear you were gone, stolen away in fact. 'Halloa, how can that be?' said I, 'I did not meet them.' 'Did you not?' cried Mrs Blake. 'Well, deuce take it, that is extraordinary.'"

"Did she say so indeed?"

"I don't mean she used those words, though she

thought them, I know, by her look. Now I want your opinion on my dead-game picture."

"I fear that it is too dark, my lord, and we must not keep Mrs Blake's dinner waiting, for though I am not at all afraid of her swearing at us, I do not wish to annoy her."

"Ah, yes, Mrs Blake is mistress, I know. The parson here, like myself, is under petticoat government. Nothing like a mother or a sister to keep one in order. I'll be bound a wife is nothing to it. One cannot get away from a sister, and one cannot make her quiet and obedient. You see she has never undertaken anything of the kind, as I understand wives do when one marries them."

"But I have heard, my lord, that they sometimes break their word and rebel."

"Ah, now, that must be the husband's fault. 'Keep a strict hand on them,' that's my maxim."

"I should recommend you to keep it a secret if you wish to find a wife. No woman will marry you if she knows your opinion."

"Seriously now! Well, but I am sorry I said so then."

"Oh, never mind, there is no harm done as yet, I promise not to betray you; and now, indeed, we must say good-bye to Miss Osborne."

Miss Osborne was not to be found and, to Emma's annoyance, Lord Osborne accompanied them home. He talked too much and Mr Howard too little. The way being down-hill, they reached the Parsonage gate in just five minutes. Here Lord Osborne turned back, as Emma had hoped. She had

not, however, anticipated a complete silence between the gate and the house-door.

"Well, Emma," said Elizabeth, when Emma came upstairs to prepare for dinner. "I should like to know what you have been doing all this time."

"Looking at pictures, Elizabeth. You know what I went for."

"I know what you went for, but not what you stayed for. Looking at pictures! And in the dark too."

Emma laughed.

"Of what do you suspect me, Elizabeth?" she cried, as her sister placed a candle, so as to throw the light on her face.

"Who has been making love to you, the peer or the parson? And which do you prefer?"

"How can you ask?" returned Emma, blushing and laughing. "Would you hesitate yourself? Is not Lord Osborne the most captivating, elegant, lively, fascinating young nobleman who ever made rank gracious and desirable? Would you not certainly accept him yourself?"

"Why, yes, I think I should. It would be something to be Lady Osborne. Mistress of all those rooms and servants and carriages and horses! I should enjoy it, but then I shall never have the offer."

"Do not refuse it on my account," said Emma.

"Very well, and when I am Lady Osborne," returned her sister, "I shall be very kind to Mrs

Howard. I will send and ask her to dine with me most Sundays, and some week-days too."

"In the meantime," remarked Emma, "there is a dinner downstairs to be eaten, and we are in danger of keeping Mrs Blake waiting."

The evening was a disappointment to Emma. Mr Howard was so very quiet. She wondered if he might be tired, and speculated as to his health, then, with a warm blush, it occurred to her that he might be regretting the prospect of parting to-morrow.

"You are keeping too close to the fire," said Elizabeth.

It was a relief when Mr Howard took up again the book he was reading aloud to them. The evening ended in the usual discussion of the morrow's weather.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE weather, so long watched and waited on, was not after all to bring a decision. The snow remained, but the Miss Watsons returned home.

About eleven o'clock, whilst the ladies were employed at their needlework, a note was handed to Miss Watson, with the information that a post-chaise was waiting. With much surprise Elizabeth opened the dispatch.

It was from her father, telling her that he was wearied by their long absence, and had sent their man to the town for a post-chaise, in which they could return home by taking the highroad. This, although greatly adding to the distance, would be safer than the lanes. The man could follow with their own conveyance at his leisure. He begged them to return without delay. Elizabeth was relieved, and in the anticipation of home, recollected all her anxieties.

There was some sadness felt by all at parting, but Mr. Howard was the real sufferer. He comforted himself, however, by offering to ride over to Stanton in a few days' time, to recover the additional wraps which Mrs Blake insisted on providing.

The journey home was made in comfort and without adventure. The sisters had much to think of, and spoke but little. Elizabeth had no

experience which she could at all compare with that of the last few days, and Emma had too many thoughts to compare any of them.

The arrival home was all that could be wished. Mr Watson was genuinely glad to see them, and Margaret for a few minutes was absent from the parlour. This, however, gave her additional grounds for complaint when she did appear.

"You are to have all the fun, and I am not even to hear of it. I had hoped to get some news. I am sure I am almost dead with wearisome dullness, for not a creature have we seen. No one has been near us. Some people contrive to keep all the amusement, all the luck, everything that is good and pleasant to themselves."

As Elizabeth recounted, Margaret's anger grew, and she was ready to cry with vexation to think of her sisters having so much to amuse them. Elizabeth and Emma were unfortunate in being obliged to listen to these recitals of grievances, while unable to enjoy any of the pleasure which Margaret obtained from them.

Elizabeth was kept busily employed for some days in putting to rights the things which had gone awry during their absence, and in assisting her, Emma found more happy contentment than she had hitherto enjoyed at Stanton.

Several times each day, Elizabeth, with a sigh, expressed the wish that one thing or another would look more as they had it at the Castle. Emma's thoughts must be suppressed, but it did occur to her that between Osborne Castle and Stanton there

was a happy mean, which might exactly suit herself. After a few days, as the snow melted, Emma found herself frequently at the window. On the following Wednesday, while busy upstairs, she heard the pleasant bustle of an arrival, and hurrying down, all expectation, met—Tom Musgrave.

Emma had some experience of the efforts required by politeness, but never had she found it harder to call up a smile—Tom Musgrave, with his usual chatter of dogs, horses, and the Castle! Mr Watson was not there to check him, and he ran on and on.

“You have no idea,” he declared, “of how we do things at Osborne Castle. It is unfortunate that you could not see over the plate, when you were staying at the Parsonage. If I had only been at the Castle, I would have arranged it for you.”

“But,” broke in Margaret, “they did go to the Castle, dining, and this and that and the other for three days, and I here all the time with a headache and no one to speak to.”

Tom Musgrave turned to the others for confirmation of this amazing recital, but Emma had grown impatient, and there was only Elizabeth to answer him.

Emma’s expectation of the relief to be gained in the garden was fully justified. Hardly had she stepped out into the fresh air, when she became aware of Mr Howard dismounting at the gate.

They met with an appearance of mutual satisfaction, but after the first greetings, Emma found that she must carry on the conversation by herself. After a few attempts to gain his interest, she enquired :

"Are you not well, Mr Howard?"

"Perfectly so, I thank you."

"Then you must be out of humour," she declared; "only I feel there should be a more polite word."

"Be charitable, and call it out of spirits," he replied. There was a short pause, broken by Mr Howard. "I am the bearer of this note from Miss Osborne."

Emma opened the letter handed to her, and found, to her surprise, that it was an invitation for the Miss Watsons to a concert and ball at the Castle for the following Tuesday. Her surprise increased as she read on, and learnt that she herself was pressed to stay the night. "Let it be two or three rather than one," was added.

"A ball and a concert!" she exclaimed. "How delightful! If only my father will consent! You and Mrs Blake will, of course, be there?"

"Yes," he replied.

Emma, by no means willing to be at one with him in lack of animation, went on: "Then I may be sure of one partner."

"I only wish——" he began, but what he wished is for ever uncertain, for Mr Watson called to them from the window, and desired that Mr Howard might be brought upstairs. Mr Howard seemed relieved at anything that made it unnecessary to finish the sentence he had begun. Emma witnessed a cordial greeting, and was then prepared to leave them.

"No, no, Emma," protested her father. "You

are to stay and talk to Mr Howard. I am fit only to put in a word or two at a time. When you have suffered half what I have, Howard, you will be glad to let a daughter like Emma talk for you."

"Indeed, sir, I only wish I had any prospect of a daughter like Miss Emma Watson."

Emma produced the letter for her father's inspection. He read it, and remarked :

"Osbornes and castles ! I wish you had never known them. You are only just home, and now must be going away again. No ! No ! It will turn all your heads. You are better all at home."

"I am sure, sir, I do not wish to go if you disapprove," said Emma.

She could not have used better words. Mr Watson's opposition was likely to melt much faster than snow, when there was nothing to oppose.

"Well, well," he went on, "I am not to be left with Margaret. Elizabeth is to come home with her."

"I am sure," said Mr Howard, "Miss Osborne will be much disappointed if the invitation is not accepted. She is most anxious to be better acquainted with your daughter."

"I dare say. Why should she not ? But I hope Emma does not flatter her."

"Indeed, I hope not, sir," cried Emma, and looked at Mr Howard for sympathy. But his countenance was clouded, and thereafter Emma's gentlest efforts at conversation were unavailing.

A few more sentences were exchanged. Mr Howard was conducted downstairs and, after a few

minutes' conversation in the parlour, set out for home with the parcels neatly packed away by Emma in the saddle-bags.

He had much to occupy his mind. He had started from home in the morning in the usual unequal spirits of a lover. His sister, perceiving that he needed a ride, and a ride in a certain direction, had insisted that she could no longer spare a certain cloak which she had lent to Elizabeth, and he must not fail to go to Stanton and fetch it. On his way thither he had called at the Castle, and had there been taken into confidence by Lord Osborne.

"It will be a deuced poor connection, but I mean to marry her. What do you think, Howard?" had been Lord Osborne's method of seeking advice.

Mr Howard had replied that the lady was certainly most charming, and enquired as to whether Miss Emma might be supposed to be willing.

"As to that," replied his lordship, "I have only just made up my mind. As I watched you riding through the park, in fact, but I am not one to change. I perceive not the least distaste on her part, and what is there to hinder us?"

Mr Howard's reflections on the ride to Stanton had been very simple and very sad. Emma was to be Lady Osborne, and he himself was to die a bachelor. It was not surprising that Emma found him lacking in animation. Her own feelings after his departure were those of bewilderment, and it was with an effort that she returned to the parlour, and listened to her sister's comments on the invitation from the Castle.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next few days passed quietly. Mr and Mrs Hopkins made Emma's home-coming an occasion to pay their respects to Mr Watson.

Mr Hopkins was Mr Watson's curate, and lived at the farther end of the parish. They were persons of no attainments, whose position was rendered tolerable by the absence of children. Elizabeth and Emma returned the visit, but there was nothing to excite either interest or pity.

Mr Watson decided that the expense of a post-chaise must be incurred for the occasion of the ball. There was some difficulty in fixing the hour at which they should leave Stanton for the Castle. Margaret was for the earliest possible setting out, that nothing might be missed. Elizabeth, recollecting a number of half-hours spent with the Edwards at the assemblies, and that this time there would be no Mrs Edwards to sit by, thought they might be late without serious loss of enjoyment. Emma's suggestion that they should do their best to arrive at the correct time was finally agreed to.

All that might be done to fit the Miss Watsons for the occasion had been accomplished, and they sat in the parlour awaiting the word that the post-chaise was at the door.

"We shall be vastly late," said Margaret; "you

would not listen to me. As well not go as be late."

Elizabeth reminded her that the concert was to take place before the ball, and that they would miss none of the dancing.

Margaret expressed doubt and discontent. "It could not be known how long the journey would take. What might not happen on the road? They should have gone an hour since."

Mr Watson's stick struck the floor above. Elizabeth, running up, was told that, if they had a mind to go anywhere, it would be well to make some move in the matter, before the post-horses froze, and that they had been standing there he could not say how long.

Within five minutes they were off, and the first thought of Margaret's muslin being likely to be crushed, and of her having forgotten her favourite shawl was past, and all were happy in silence. Elizabeth, thankful to be quiet; Emma, looking forward to meeting her friends; and Margaret engaged in a romantic occupation which had been her solace for days.

She saw herself pursued by Lord Osborne and replying with gentle dignity, "No, my lord, as our host you have duties to your other guests." "Other guests be ——," says he. "Remember in whose presence you stand!" replies she, with hauteur. "I have remembered, I do remember, I will remember," replies he. "The Lady Blueface awaits you, and it is my desire that you do not disappoint her," says Margaret. With a last passionate glance,

he departs, and advances with a scowl on the Lady : Blueface.

The chaise gave a jolt, and tossed Margaret against Elizabeth, and the fear for her muslin, and indignation with Elizabeth, who asked her to be careful, kept Margaret's attention fixed on the commonplace. Unable to return to her happy state, she could only change places with Emma, change back again, and fret.

At last they passed through the park gates and, approaching the Castle, heard the sound of an instrument, which Margaret declared to be her favourite performance, of which she must now perforce be disappointed, but which Emma afterwards judged to be a musician tuning his fiddle. A moment later they were at the door, a groom was at the horses' head, and before they could alight, Lord Osborne had hurried down the steps to assist them. It might well appear to Margaret that her dream was coming true.

Miss Carr conducted them upstairs to remove their wraps, and coming down, they were again met by his lordship, who led them through the great drawing-room, where the dancing was to take place, to the smaller apartment set with chairs for the concert, at the door of which stood Lady Osborne greeting her guests with absent-minded condescension. Addressing himself to Emma, Lord Osborne asked :

“ Now where shall we sit ? There are two seats there right at the back, with two others just in front, a famous place to my fancy, where we can have a

famous time, without being too much troubled with all the noise. Music may be all very well to dance to, if one likes dancing, but why we should have to sit and listen to it, I cannot imagine ! ”

Margaret assured him that he had chosen the most delightful spot in the room, and was for hastening there, when Emma interposed.

“ We have come to enjoy the performance, my lord ; let us sit where we can see and hear.”

“ Then you enjoy listening to music ! Upon my word ! Then it must be the front seats, and I have taken some pains to keep those at the back unoccupied. There are only three vacant in the front. Pray let us sit at the back and be comfortable. You will hear plenty. They have been trying over their music, and I assure you I could hear all over the Castle. Pray, Miss Emma, you are always so good-natured.”

Emma, feeling she endangered her reputation for complaisance, protested against the front seats also, and they were all presently accommodated towards the middle of the room.

Emma would have been delighted to have Mr Howard sit by her and converse, and would have been satisfied to listen to the music, but neither of these alternatives was possible, and she must attend to the dull repetitions of Lord Osborne, which gave place, when his lordship was called away, to the yet more tedious rattle of Tom Musgrave. She had the additional mortification of being aware that the latter annoyance resulted from the former. She tried for motives both interested and disinterested

to get him seated by Margaret, but without success. At last to her relief he rose to greet some ladies, and for a few minutes, happiness seemed assured. Mr Howard approached to bow and enquire for their father, sat down in the empty chair, and began to converse. He did not appear to be in spirits, but she felt that she could rouse his animation, if only he remained by her side. This was not to be. Lady Osborne's eye-glass was turned in their direction, and a moment afterwards an agreeable-looking man of middle-age came towards them.

"Howard, you are wanted by her Ladyship, quite indispensable, for some purpose; but, before you go, I request that you bequeath me your place!"

It was some consolation to Emma to see with what reluctance Mr Howard rose. He formally presented Sir William Gordon to the Miss Watsons, who recognised him as the gentleman who had been most in attendance on Miss Osborne during the evening. Mr Howard then made his way across the room towards his hostess with a gravity of demeanour, which certainly showed no great satisfaction. A moment later Emma saw him established near Lady Osborne, and in conversation with her party.

Sir William, after a few civilities for Elizabeth and Margaret, addressed himself to Emma.

"Have you been often to the Castle?" he asked.

Emma replied that she had not.

"Then are you sure that you understand the family politics?"

Emma replied that she had no knowledge of them, and little curiosity.

"Impossible!" he replied. "You must have some curiosity, or at least pretend to it, in order that I may have the pleasure of rallying you on it, and finally yielding, and letting you into the secret."

Emma professed a total disregard for secrets.

"Then I shall be obliged to tell it without encouragement, for if you do not know it, you will transgress again."

"Again!" exclaimed Emma in alarm.

"Certainly," replied Sir William gravely. "Were you not guilty of keeping Mr Howard at your side when her ladyship wanted him?"

"Indeed, no! He went directly she sent for him," said she, colouring.

"To send should not have been necessary. He should have been at her side!"

"Surely not," replied Emma. "Mr Howard has no rank to give him a claim to such importance. May he not sit where he choose?"

"Oh, as to choice," said Sir William, "I do not quarrel with his choice. It is more a matter of her ladyship's choice."

Emma looked and felt puzzled.

"I really wish him well," went on Sir William. "I think he had better marry the dowager."

Emma was unable to reply. Painful recollections, painful forebodings occupied her mind. Sir William continued the subject.

"There is no such disparity in their ages. Only

fifteen years at most ! The jointure might be some time in his possession."

"I really think we had better talk of something else," Emma replied.

"Certainly," said he, "let us talk of the daughter. Do you think her over-dressed ?"

"No, indeed, I think her very elegant," said she, with a smile at his audacity.

"Well, then, the son ; here he comes treading on every one's toes, and looking round for some one. Do you think he is trying to find me, Miss Watson ? Really, such public notice confuses me. I am so modest. Am I not blushing now ?" Emma could only laugh.

"Shall I give my seat to his lordship ?" he asked.

"As you wish," replied she. Whilst she spoke Lord Osborne caught sight of them, and gladly took the chair proffered by Sir William.

"A man should always live out of doors if he wants to have any peace and enjoyment," grumbled his lordship.

"A little damp sometimes, my lord," replied Emma.

"There is the harness-room," he went on, "it is never damp in the harness-room. The saddles and all would be spoiled ; there is always a fire."

Margaret interposed.

"I love a harness-room ! Let me advise you ! Add a parlour, and from that throw out a dining-room."

He considered longer than usual.

"And when I have it all nice, some woman will

come in and tell me what I am to do. What do you say, Miss Emma?"

"It appears that if you would be free you are fated to shelter under the trees and sleep under the harness."

"You are quizzing me to make your sisters laugh, Miss Emma; you do not know what I have to bear."

"As you will not have me quizz, I can but say truthfully, very little to bear, I imagine."

"You do not know. I sit here for hours, and look forward to supper with you, and now I am to take in that old fright, Lady F——. Let me point her out to you."

Emma, who had spent her time in wishing him elsewhere, now begged him to keep his seat, but without success. Elizabeth whispered to Emma that she saw Mr Howard, and that he appeared to be making his way in their direction, and then Emma heard Tom Musgrave's voice from behind.

"As Osborne cannot lead you to supper, please do me the honour, Miss Emma."

"Thank you, Mr Musgrave," she replied. "But we are anxious to be of Mrs Blake's party at supper. We have barely seen her."

"There will be no difficulty," was the reply. "I will arrange it with Mrs Blake at once. You can bring your old woman, Osborné. She will not hear a word we say. It will be famous."

CHAPTER XX

THE last performance was approved, and all moved towards the supper-room, where Emma found herself at a table without one person to interest her. Lord Osborne was witty at the expense of a deaf old lady, and Tom Musgrave must of course be so too. Margaret, sitting beside Tom, was prepared to be as bad as either and, as the young men passed the wine, Emma was forced to exert all her powers to keep the conversation within bounds. She was much relieved when a stir was made amongst the company to leave the room. Mrs Blake and Elizabeth approached their table, the former saying :

“Miss Elizabeth wished that we might all move together.” Mrs Blake shouted in Lady F——’s ear, and they stood up, Margaret and Tom Musgrave remaining seated.

Emma spoke to Margaret. “Let us all move out together.”

“Yes, in an instant,” replied Margaret and, turning to Tom Musgrave, said something not audible to the others.

Emma lingered, and the whole party was hindered.

“Do not trouble as to Margaret. She will be only the more obstinate, if we delay. She is used to do for herself,” whispered Elizabeth, and Emma had perforce to move with the party.

On reaching the ball-room, the party was joined by Mr Howard, who began to speak with Miss Watson. At the same moment Sir William Gordon applied to Emma for the privilege of standing up with her. She could not do otherwise than accept, and in the enjoyment of the dance with a lively partner, forgot her disappointment, after seeing that Mr Howard and Elizabeth stood up together. Sir William did not return to the subject of Lady Osborne's marriage, and Emma was almost able to persuade herself that he had spoken in jest.

As she neared the end of the set, however, Emma was recalled to anxiety. Elizabeth on passing whispered to her :

"Where is Margaret? I cannot see her."

Emma gazed around, when the opportunity offered, without success, and then, just before the two dances ended, saw Margaret enter with Tom Musgrave, saw them sit down together, and noticed that while Margaret talked on, Tom Musgrave seemed always silent.

The dance being over, Emma sought Elizabeth.

"Can you not induce Margaret to join us, and sit with Mrs Blake?" she hazarded. "Do you not think that she has sat with Mr Musgrave too long?"

Elizabeth looked surprised.

"I do not know. I had not thought of it, but I am sure that you know best. I will try and persuade her."

Margaret, on this occasion, was ready to do as desired, and they found chairs by Mrs Blake, who was chatting with Miss Carr.

Presently Emma saw Mr Howard coming towards their party. He was delayed by one of the officers, but was again on his way to herself, their eyes met and then—he hesitated, turned aside, and it was Lord Osborne who was addressing her.

“I want to show you something of interest in the hall, Miss Emma.”

Emma replied that they would be happy to accompany him, and looked at Elizabeth.

“No, no,” said he, “I want you to be the first to see it, and then the whole room may come.”

Emma still kept her seat, but Elizabeth said in a low voice :

“You cannot refuse, Emma.”

She rose, and they made their way out to the hall, and then stood silent. Emma was much annoyed and, gaining confidence as she spoke, asked :

“Is it the name of the object of interest, or the direction in which it lies, which your lordship has forgotten ?”

“Do not be so hard,” he replied, “you are usually so good-natured. I want to speak to you.”

He said no more, and it was Emma who broke the silence.

“As there is nothing to be viewed,” she said, with the directness and sweetness of manner which Lord Osborne described as good-natured, “perhaps we had better return to Mrs Blake’s party, and you can talk to me there.”

Lord Osborne appeared much agitated. “Can you not see that I have something to say ?”

Emma grew desperate.

"If you have something to say, say it, my lord."

"Let us sit down," he replied. "I shall talk better sitting down."

"Then pray let us return to Mrs Blake," said Emma again, "and find seats by her."

She turned towards the ball-room. Lord Osborne was now to make the most serious effort of his twenty-one years.

"Miss Emma," he said, "will you—will you be so good-natured as to be my wife?"

Emma's surprise was great, so great that she would have found it impossible to make any immediate reply. The door behind Lord Osborne opened and Lady Osborne sailed out. She took no notice of Emma, but, as she passed her son, she commanded.

"Find Howard for me," and crossing the hall entered her private apartment. Lord Osborne, however, remained looking at Emma, whose thoughts were now sufficiently clear to make a courteous reply possible.

"I am conscious of the honour you do me, my lord, and trust I do not pain you, but what you ask is impossible to me."

A slight curtsy, and she turned away, leaving the young man red-faced and embarrassed, to swallow his disappointment, and to forget his mother's commission. Emma had now but one thought, to return home with all possible despatch. She returned to the ball-room, excused herself to Mrs Blake on the grounds of fatigue, left a message to reassure Elizabeth, and hurrying up the great

staircase, gained her own apartment, and re-packed her belongings, determined to get away from the Castle that night by returning in the chaise with her sisters.

Without doubt, Lord Osborne's proposal had brought about this decision, and yet the words of Lady Osborne, and her preoccupied manner, seemed to Emma to be the cause of her own extreme longing for home and quiet. Lady Osborne had indeed spoken as if Mr Howard must necessarily be at her side, and the strangeness and restraint of Mr Howard's own manner were perhaps to be explained by the same cause. Was it possible that Sir William Gordon was correct, and that Lady Osborne was to marry Mr Howard?

Emma debated whether she should seek out Lady Osborne to make her apologies, and explain the necessity for her returning home. She tried to arrange some words of explanation, but it was not to be done. She could not speak of Lord Osborne's offer, and was aware that to Lady Osborne her refusal of it would appear incredible. She decided to leave without explanation, and writing a few formal words of apology, stating that she was obliged to return home, but giving no reason, she folded it into a note, and resolved to hand it to a servant at the moment of her departure, with the request that it might be given to Lady Osborne. She would remain upstairs, creep down at the last moment, whisper an explanation to Elizabeth, and at last be safe in the chaise, perhaps altogether unperceived. At length a change in the music

informed her that the last dance had begun. It seemed endless, and gazing round the elegantly furnished apartment, she was driven to the consideration of what her situation would have been had her answer to Lord Osborne been different. These thoughts were a relief from the agony of her former ones, and she strove to keep her mind fixed on these less agitating ideas, as she feared that longer dwelling on the possible situation of Lady Osborne and Mr Howard would weaken her self-control, and make it impossible for her to carry out her plan with dignity.

At last the music ceased with a flourish, and then she heard voices in the hall; and going down to the head of the lowest flight of stairs, she awaited her opportunity.

She saw her sisters in their wraps and heard Elizabeth say.

“I must see Emma before we leave.”

In a moment Emma was by her side, and had hurriedly announced her plan. Elizabeth showed much surprise, but Emma only repeated that she must go home. There was further delay before Margaret could be convinced that she might not remain instead, but at length they were in the chaise, the door was shut, the horses started, and Emma sat in the darkness holding Elizabeth by the hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILST making his way back to the ball-room after supper, Mr Howard was stopped by Tom Musgrave, who told him that Lady Osborne desired his presence in her own room. He was received with even more than the usual gracious condescension.

“Pray be seated. Yes, in the settee here, so that I may talk with more ease.”

There was a pause during which her Ladyship took stock of her situation.

“My good Mr Howard,” she went on, “there can be little doubt that in the next few years I must be deprived of my children, which will make a considerable difference in my way of life, a very considerable difference, Mr Howard. This renders it the more fitting that I should myself consider, nay, I will go further and say *seek*, yes, seek a change. You may probably have had no thought of my interest in you being other than the interest of the patron in the clergyman——”

Mr Howard half rose, and made as though to speak, but with an impatient gesture, she motioned him to remain seated.

“Pray permit me to say what I desire you to hear. In short, my dear Mr Howard, my wish is that we unite,—I will not say our fortunes, for I am well aware that on your side there is none,—but our

lives.—My rank will bring consequence to your situation, and neither your profession nor person can disgrace mine.”

Mr Howard, in a state of much agitation from more than one emotion, was now permitted to rise, and, speaking very rapidly, replied :

“ I am much obliged for your—I regret that this should be impossible. I am very grateful for your kind—for all your kindness—My affections—engaged elsewhere.”

With a hasty bow he was gone. Lady Osborne was left, also much disturbed by a variety of feelings. Fortunately the consideration of the evil of so unequal a match was soon predominant.

We might draw a moving picture of the rejected mother and son weeping in each other's arms, but have to confess that Lady Osborne went to bed, and that Lord Osborne made the discovery that emotion is exhausting, and felt the better for cake and a glass of wine.

Once outside the park gates, Emma found that the sympathetic pressure of Elizabeth's hand, or some other cause, was restoring her composure with surprising rapidity, and she experienced some shame on this account. Nevertheless, thoughts, exciting and not altogether unpleasant, continued to present themselves. She had had an offer, at a ball, and the ball at a Castle, and the suitor the Lord of the Castle. What would any one think if they knew? What would Mr Howard think? Her thoughts ran on, and, knowing that such thoughts were unwise and a danger to her peace of mind,

she continued to think them till interrupted by Margaret.

“Why would not Lady Osborne let you stay?”

Emma replied that she had wished to be at home.

“You mean that Lady Osborne desired you to go home?”

Emma assured her that this was not so.

“Well, who was it that would not have you?”

Emma explained that no one had objected to her presence, but that she herself had experienced a sudden desire not to be separated from her family.

“Have you told the truth to Elizabeth? Do you ever expect to be asked to the Castle again? Just as we are taking you into high life, you disgrace us all. Do not suppose but that I shall find out the truth.”

Emma was thankful when they reached Stanton, but here trouble awaited them. Nanny met them with the information that Mr Watson had been taken very unwell soon after their departure, that he had had her send for the apothecary, who had said little and shaken his head much, and forgotten to leave any physic, till she ran out after him for it.

The sight of their father, quiet and free from pain, gave some reassurance, and as he firmly declined to have any one sit in his room, all were glad to retire.

Several days passed, the apothecary calling each morning, and each afternoon shortly before dark. The house was strangely quiet: it had indeed never been very lively, but there had been the possibility at any moment of the thump of Mr Watson's stick

on the floor overhead to be attended to, and his demands satisfied. Now he lay in bed, growing quieter and still quieter as the hours passed.

On the fourth day after the memorable dance at the Castle, Nanny going early to his room, found him so very quiet that her ministrations were no longer needed, and it remained only for her to carry the sad tidings to Elizabeth and Emma.

Word was sent to Croydon and Chichester, and Mr Robert Watson arrived the following morning, and Penelope before nightfall. The sisters were really glad of their brother's support in the necessary arrangements. Could he have remained thus importantly busy he might have continued to accumulate gratitude, and might even have been missed after his departure, when some further matter had to be decided. It was not to be. Affairs were settled all too soon, and entering the parlour, having warmed himself up to his subject at the fire, he began :

"Well, I must say this is most unfortunate," sitting down in his father's chair, "most unfortunate for me indeed. I had calculated my father could have lived ten years : I had certainly reckoned on ten years, and you see how I am taken in. Heavens knows what is to become of you girls ; there will not be more than two thousand pounds to divide between you, and you will expect me to give you a home."

"Do not count on me," cried Penelope, "I shall not live at Croydon, I promise you."

"So much the better, if you have some other

plan; three on one's hand is quite enough. There has been some great mismanagement, or some of you would certainly have got husbands."

"Well, to relieve your mind," continued Pert, "I will inform you that I am engaged to be married, and expect to be a wife in about a month."

"Are you indeed, my dear sister? I congratulate you. What settlements are you to have? If the papers pass through our office, I promise you I will pay every attention to see all advantageously arranged for you."

"Your liberality, my dear Robert, is most exemplary, and far beyond what I had ventured to expect from you. But I shall not trouble you. The settlements are preparing at Chichester."

"It is a very delicate matter to make known," said Margaret, "one from which a young woman of sensibility naturally shrinks; but I will so far overcome my feelings as to inform you, Robert, that I, too, am engaged to be married and, therefore, delighted as I should be to reside with my dear Jane, I hope before long to be able to receive you in my own house, and as Mrs Tom Musgrave, to return the kindness shown to Margaret Watson."

"What!" said Robert, staring at her with undisguised amazement, "are you mad, Margaret?"

"Indeed, I hope not," replied she simpering. "I am engaged to my dear Tom Musgrave, as any one might expect, and no doubt we shall be married in time."

Her brother looked doubtfully at her, but, after a moment's consideration, replied:

“ Well, Margaret, if that is the case, you deserve more credit than I had ever thought possible, for I would not have given much for your chance with Tom ; but since you say he is engaged to you, I am heartily glad to hear it. As times go, it is a good match.”

“ A good match ! ” I should think so,” cried Margaret. “ I only wish my sisters may make half so good a one. Tom Musgrave is a man every woman may envy me.”

“ I doubt if his income was ever a clear thousand a year, Margaret,” replied Robert, “ but, provided he is not in debt, you may do very well. If only Elizabeth and Emma were in a like case we might all be very comfortable.”

This was worse than Emma had feared.

“ Jane was of the opinion that there must have been a great want of management on your part, Emma,” he continued, “ during your visit to the Howards and the Castle, or you might certainly have turned them to better account.”

“ I regret that Jane should disapprove of me,” replied Emma.

“ I warned her that it was beyond what might be hoped for, but she would have it that, with proper attention, you could have secured the young lord. I understand that you had excellent opportunities ; it was certainly your duty to make every effort for such an establishment. In such a position, you would have been of service to your family ; you might even have been useful to me, but as I said to Jane, it was beyond what could be hoped.”

Emma, though distressed, was able to feel that she had gained much by keeping her own counsel. What would have been the anger and reproach had the true state of the case been known !

Robert had more to say on the subject, and was only checked by the arrival of Mr Watson's lawyer, which enabled Emma to escape. •

On the first opportunity Elizabeth confided to Emma her satisfaction at the prospect of Penelope's coming marriage.

"Dr Harding is old and asthmatic," she allowed, "but he has a sufficient income, and that is what Pen is resolved on."

Emma expressed the opinion that old age and ill-health could not be ignored, and that Penelope was to be pitied in making so mercenary a marriage.

"If any one is to be pitied, it is Dr Harding," was Elizabeth's rejoinder, "but about Margaret, what is your opinion? I cannot feel secure that all is as Margaret states."

"My dear sister," replied Emma, "how can you doubt that it is as Margaret says? What possible reason could she have to deceive us, even were she so unprincipled?"

Elizabeth hesitated.

"I do not know. You do not know Tom as I do; it is all very odd, and I can only hope that you are right. You and I can manage together till one of your young lords comes to take you away. My poor father, it is all very strange and difficult."

CHAPTER XXII

As soon as Sam received the news of his father's death, he obtained leave of absence, and arrived the same afternoon at Stanton. Emma was sitting in the darkened parlour, when she heard an unknown step in the passage. The stranger passed the door, then paused, returned, and entered slowly. There was not more than the doubt of the moment as to his identity. There was so strong a family likeness, a likeness in more than features, a likeness in mind and temper, a sympathy of character, that the hesitation of brother and sister was brief indeed. The cordial fraternal embrace which followed was too much for Emma's composure, and she burst into tears. Sam was deeply affected, but commanded his emotion in order to soothe her, and soon they were seated side by side, with his arm about her, while he drew from her all the circumstances of their father's death. That hour repaid Emma for much that she had suffered.

When later he was greeted by Penelope and Margaret with indifference, and by Robert with almost the appearance of aversion, Emma was grieved for him, and Elizabeth's kindly pre-occupation was still below his deserts. Sam, however, seemed quite unconscious of anything lacking, and only anxious to resume his conversation

with Emma, which had been interrupted by the entrance of the others. Soon they were pacing the shrubbery while they talked. They spoke of her past life, her uncle and aunt, and the effects of the changes that had taken place. They spoke of their father. They spoke of Sam's prospects, of his attachment to Mary Edwards, of his hopes of success in his profession. Then they returned to Emma's outlook, and he regretted the necessity for the move to Croydon, and the sojourn in Robert's house.

"I cannot bear that you should be with Jane," he said. "She has nothing to recommend her to such as you. She will never understand you, and will make no effort."

Emma protested that she had the intention to be of all possible use, and would thereby gain consideration, and perhaps affection, but Sam's declaration that, as soon as he had a house, however small, she should share it, did much to lighten her heart.

On the morning after the funeral, Robert with studied formality summoned the family into the parlour, and having seated himself at the head of the table, directed Sam to the place at the foot, the ladies seating themselves on either side.

The new head of the family, after arranging and re-arranging certain papers before him, and having paused, coughed, and cleared his throat in a befitting manner, delivered himself of the following sentence :

"My dear brother and sisters, I propose to read the will of the deceased gentleman, our late lamented father."

After these words spoken very slowly, the orator

gazed for some time over Sam's head, and then proceeded to read at a great pace, as though to show that this was by no means the first occasion on which he had officiated.

• He was interrupted by Penelope.

• "I object!"

This was a new experience for the attorney, who stared open-mouthed, and then repeated:

"You object?"

"I do," Penelope rejoined.

It took more than a sister to put Mr Robert out of countenance for long. In his best professional manner he questioned the interrupter.

"Object to what, may I ask!"

"To that will."

"You object to this will! May I point out that you have not heard it read!"

"I have heard quite enough. It is shameful! You must have written it yourself. Everything is left to you and Sam."

Mr Watson had now quite recovered.

"Sister Penelope, my father might very well have done as you suggest, in the knowledge that I, I think I may say we, would have—would have done what is proper: but if you will condescend to listen to what I shall read further, you will hear what—what I shall read."

Penelope appeared very willing to continue the dispute, but, by the united appeal of all, was induced to remain silent. At the end of the reading, nothing was clear to the ladies, save that the names of Elizabeth, Penelope and Margaret had been

mentioned. It was Sam's question that drew from Robert the admission that the two brothers were to hold everything in trust for the three sisters, and to pay them the income quarterly. Sam continued :

"You misseu out Emma's name."

Robert replied that it was not in the will. Elizabeth proposed that the will be changed.

"My father would wish it," she said, "he would be thinking that Emma was well provided for."

Robert was horrified and amused.

"Change a will ! Upon my word ! So that is the way you girls would do business ! There will be thirty to thirty-five pounds a year for each of the three of you, and Emma has had her chance, and a better one than we others had."

Elizabeth turned to Emma with—

"Well, Emma, I will share my portion with you."

"That is very good of you, Elizabeth," responded Emma, "but it must not be. I have had an easy life, and you a hard one. It is not unreasonable that there should now be a change."

"It is settled then, that you three come to Croydon for the present. Elizabeth and Margaret will arrange with Mrs Watson as to what they shall contribute to defray in some measure all this additional expense : Emma in her unfortunate case must be as useful to us as she can."

Elizabeth had more to say to Emma in private, but the younger sister was not to be convinced. She did not lie awake the whole night in an agony of apprehension, but she did have some very

anxious thoughts. The most unbearable of the evils she conjured up, that of having to apply to Robert for money, was happily never realized, but the next few months gave her a juster opinion of the value of money than all the years of her life that had gone before.

The will being read, there was nothing further to detain Mr Watson at the Parsonage, and within an hour he was on the road to Croydon, having assured his sisters that they might expect to see him again on Friday, December 18th, that being the day fixed for the sale and their removal to Croydon.

Sam also was obliged to return to Guildford, and the ladies were left to themselves.

The intervening days were busy and unhappy. Many articles were set aside as "not to be thought of as being sold," though they might only take with them what could be of use in furnishing one bedroom, as it had been arranged that Emma should sleep with her niece.

A number of the Miss Watson's acquaintances called to condole with them on their bereavement, and the consequent break-up of their home, but were unable to keep their eyes off the furniture. Cards arrived from Osborne Castle. Mrs Blake paid a visit of condolence. She brought a message from her brother, who was from home arranging an exchange of livings. This was a shock to Emma. Mr Howard to exchange! To leave the neighbourhood! She remembered there had been some talk of a removal, but it had been lightly advocated by Mrs Blake and nothing immediate, nothing definite,

had been spoken of. Mr Howard had not seemed to consider such a possibility, and now it was all settled, and Mrs Blake, in place of paying her particular attention, was continually addressing Elizabeth. Emma controlled herself, but made an excuse to leave the apartment. Soon afterwards she heard the chaise depart, and learned that Mrs Blake had gone without leaving any message of farewell for herself.

She forced herself to consider the circumstances calmly. Mrs Blake, from the time they became acquainted at the assembly ball till now, had been kind, attentive and unreserved. Now, when they had lost their father, when she herself, perforce, must work for her living, Mrs Blake was altogether changed. No explanation of this could calm her feelings, and she became more deeply agitated the longer she pondered. Her only relief was to be found in the distasteful task of preparing for the sale and removal.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE sale took place, and was followed by a very uncomfortable drive to Croydon. Robert appeared to be of the opinion that Emma, having no money, had no substance, or at any rate, none that required space to sit. Mrs Robert Watson had made careful preparation for the reception of her sisters. Her acquaintances had been informed that, "My poor sisters are left penniless, and so of course they turn to me. Should any little party given by me, in the future be not quite what we have been accustomed to give, it will be on account of the Miss Watsons. If in the future we are unable to give on quite the same scale to the many good works which appeal to our generosity, it must be remembered that charity begins at home."

The matter of the sheets in the second spare chamber, which was to be shared by Elizabeth and Margaret, had caused some trouble and annoyance. Mrs Robert had actually removed them, put them safely away, and replaced them by others more suitable, before it occurred to her that it might be wiser to consult Mr Watson. After due consideration had been given to the circumstances that Margaret declared herself promised to Mr Tom Musgrave, and that this was very probably true; that they might be married, even married at an early

dase, and that Margaret was well acquainted with the contents of the linen chest ; it was decided that the guest sheets should be unfolded and replaced.

This had been in Mrs Robert's mind as she waited a full half-hour after the dinner-hour for the arrival, but she comforted herself by recalling her explanation to the nursemaid that she might now consider herself more as a lady's-maid, as Miss Emma would soon be accustomed to attending to Miss Augusta. Though the half-hour drew out to forty minutes, this reflection gave so much satisfaction that Mrs Robert was able to greet her sisters with civility.

All were tired and hungry, and enjoyed the good dinner to which they almost immediately sat down. Robert and Jane, less formal than when entertaining their acquaintance, and with more of good manners and consideration than they were accustomed to display in family life, were at their best, and could tea and bedroom candles have followed with sufficient rapidity, Elizabeth and Emma might have retired in unexpected peace and hope.

As the hand of the clock slowly revolved, Emma experienced the several stages of boredom, despair, and hope of release. Mrs Robert had her needlework, which she exhibited and commented on, but was too genteel to allow of her sisters doing anything of the sort on this first evening. When her work had been sufficiently admired, Mrs Robert began to talk of other matters.

"Margaret is already something acquainted with our society, but even she may benefit by the information and advice I am about to give you..

You, Elizabeth and Emma, have not been accustomed to quite the sort of circle of which we form a part. I cannot attach much importance to a chance visit to Osborne Castle. It is therefore of great importance that you should try to understand who is in our circle, who is outside, and above all to know something of those on the border line, sometimes in and sometimes out, in for this and out for that. In order to assist you I have been to some trouble to prepare these lists."

Here Mrs. Robert produced from her work-bag a number of pieces of paper.

"Here are set down the names of our acquaintances with the letter G., B., or D. after each name. G. is good, B. is bad, and D. is indifferent, which is without a doubt clear to you all. I request, Emma, that you will write out the three separate lists under the appropriate headings, and then they will be always available for you and your sisters to refer to. I will now give you more exact information to . . ." and so she continued.

A little later, Emma was recalled from her not very happy reflections by Mrs. Watson.

"Are you attending, Emma? This is most important."

A few minutes later, tea came up; Mr. Watson favoured them while he drank a cup of tea.

The tea was refreshing to the Miss Watsons, but unfortunately for them it also refreshed Mrs. Watson. She remarked complacently that:

"Mr. Watson always comes for his tea and muffin, even when I am alone! Do you not think him a

pattern for all husbands? He always comes for his tea and muffin." She then proceeded with the task of informing her sisters, and with the gratification of her own self-esteem.

January 6th was the occasion for one of Mrs Robert's informal evening parties. Invitations were issued in the form of personal notes on black-edged paper in deference to her husband's mourning, and "no party, just a few friends," heavily underscored. With so much recognition of the grief of the bereaved son and daughters, Mrs Robert felt that she had done all that could be expected, and gave herself up to the happiness of being in a position to direct all preparations, without the necessity of undertaking anything herself; to showing her sisters just how everything should be done, leaving them tasks, to be presently criticized; to trying how things would appear, if placed here; to seeing how they would be viewed by a guest entering the apartment, if placed there. All this untiring business put Mrs Robert in much good-humour, so that when inspecting her sisters as they sat awaiting the earliest arrival, she objected to nothing, save only the arrangement of Emma's hair.

The party was a success. The arrivals, the entries, the greetings, the exchange of compliments were above reproach. Mrs Robert was a happy woman.

"My dear Mr Boucher *and* Mrs Boucher, so good of you to come, and so good of you to be here at the hour, ~~and~~ our little party,—only we must not call it a party—so early too. You must forgive

our homely habits, just a simple hand of cards and a cup of tea ! ”

All moved with slow formality. All spoke their words with care. Next-door neighbours met as though they had last seen each other at the last party. Once seated at the card tables something more of licence was permissible, and after supper, some might behave as the best behaved at home.

There was but one unattended young gentleman of the party. Mr Jasper Purvis was younger brother to Elizabeth's former admirer, and paid his principal attention to Emma. Unfortunately, when rising from his chair to pick up one of Emma's counters, he upset the whole of Mrs Roberts', and there could be no certainty in the lady's mind that all had been restored to her.

The rising from the card tables, and the sitting down to supper had the effect of renewing earlier and more stately manners. It might fairly be supposed that the consumption of food would tend to allay the appetite, but quite the contrary was the case. At first it seemed that no one would be able to eat anything. “ Allow me to assist you to a little chicken, and let me add a morsel of ham.” “ The merest taste, ma'am, not to offend your good cook.”

However, once started, it was surprising what could be eaten by the most unwilling. Emma found herself seated between Mr Purvis and an elderly gentleman, who having enquired as to whether she was acquainted with his married sister in London, and being answered in the negative, and

receiving a like answer to the further question, "Have you been to the city of York?"—gave it up as an over-difficult task, and attended to his victuals.

Emma was then driven to make conversation with Mr Purvis, and her prejudice against him was overborne by his pleasant speech and modest bearing. The end of the evening, which was prolonged beyond the ordinary, in no wise belied the beginning.

The last guest was gone, and the success of the evening was assured. It was commented on by Mrs Watson with self-congratulation, agreed to by the Miss Watsons, and dismissed with brevity by Mr Watson, who compared his watch with the clock and recommended that they all retire.

The day following was not so fortunate. Mrs Robert stayed in bed, but was able to keep the household in disorder by enquiries and messages as to the rearrangements, and desires that one or other of the sisters would wait on her for instructions. Margaret, returning from an interview, thus addressed Emma:

"You are to go up now, I have vexed her properly."

Emma in some anxiety mounted the stairs and, entering the bed-chamber, was accosted by Mrs Robert in these words:

"I must regret having to speak to you Emma, on such a subject, but even allowing for your natural excitement on such an occasion, you were too free with Mr Purvis last night. I do not know what is

done at Osborne Castle, but in this household we are more guarded; we do not force ourselves on every young man."

Emma, blushing with annoyance, replied that it was no fault of hers that Mr Purvis had sat next to her at supper.

"As to that, I do not know," replied Mrs Robert. "It was certainly not so arranged by me. You may go now."

Emma, who knew to what lengths her sister's tongue could go, was thankful to escape.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE months that followed were, for Emma, at the best, tedious, at the worst, hardly to be borne. Augusta, the spoiled child of a foolish mother, gave her something of affection and much more of trouble. Mrs Watson was ever ready to find fault. Margaret, more and more irritated by her failure to procure a visit, or even an answer to her letters, from Tom Musgrave, and by the waning attentions from Robert and Mrs Watson, might always be depended upon to make matters worse. Elizabeth only was a comfort. No one else could be trusted. Mr Howard had been quite prepared, when opportunity offered, to make an advantageous exchange of livings; Mr Howard, whose eyes had said more than his lips, but who had been very well able to forget. After all, their acquaintance had been but short. Elizabeth, Margaret and herself, were not they all in a like case? Would it not have been more sensible to accept Lord Osborne's offer? *He* could not have been so unpleasant as Mrs Watson. Lady Osborne would not have had to mend a child's clothing in a bad light!

Penelope wrote to inform them of the date when she would be married, but sent no invitation, thereby greatly incensing Mrs Watson, who observed that, had her sisters had the sense and

sisterly affection to keep on terms with Penelope, no such slight could have been offered her.

Margaret's turn to lament came when a long letter arrived for herself, after the honeymoon, describing the delightful places where it had been spent, and the glories of the bride's new home.

Unaccustomed to such confinement to the house, and to such demands on her strength, Emma became seriously unwell, and the apothecary gave his opinion that she should be some days in bed and, when able to rise, should not exert herself for a further period.

On the second day of her confinement to her room, a letter was received from Mrs Edwards, inviting Elizabeth and Emma to visit them for a few weeks immediately after Easter.

Never was a more opportune invitation, and Elizabeth hastened to her sister Jane with the letter in her hand. Mrs Robert, however, was in no hurry to consent, but on reflection decided that she *might* be able to spare Emma, if Elizabeth would remain and attend to Augusta during Emma's absence. Elizabeth accordingly penned the following reply :

CROYDON,

Wednesday, 30th March, 1808.

DEAR MRS EDWARDS—Your letter came to hand this afternoon. I hasten to reply to your generous invitation and kind enquiry. We do very well, I thank you, and all enjoy good health excepting Emma. It is on her account that I receive your communication with a particular

relief ; that is, if you find yourself able to receive one but just risen from a bed of sickness. Emma has had to keep her bed since Monday, but is now much recovered, though not yet from her room. Sam, who is come to visit us for Easter, recommends a change of air, which I am totally unable to provide, and therefore, dear Mrs. Edwards, your letter is most opportune, if it can be managed. Please excuse this short and hurried letter, but I fear the risk of any delay. Yours affectionately,

ELIZABETH WATSON.

P.S.—For myself, I must regretfully decline your goodness, being needed by Mrs Watson.

This letter was delivered as the Edwards family finished their dinner the following day and, having been read, and then read aloud by Mrs Edwards, was then to be commented on by Mr Edwards and Mary.

Mr Edwards had nothing to say beyond expressing his sympathy with the Miss Watsons on general grounds, but whether he considered them most to be pitied for being needed by Mrs Watson, or being in a bed of sickness, or for having lost their father, he did not think it necessary to specify. Miss Edwards was grieved that Emma was ill, and hoped that she might be allowed to come to them. Mrs Edwards' sympathy was chiefly with the elder sister.

"And why is Elizabeth not to come with her sister, indeed? And likely needing a change after

the nursing. I will be bound it has all fallen on her. I never had any opinion of Mrs Robert.”

Mary interposed with :

“ But Emma may come, may she not, Mama ? ”

Mrs Edwards reminded her that there would be much to arrange. How was Emma to travel ? And with whom ? She certainly would not invite Margaret, of whom she appeared to have no better opinion than of Mrs Robert. Even if they sent their carriage all the way, it would still hardly be possible for Emma to travel without escort, and she could not spare a servant. Mary, with some diffidence, mentioned Sam.

This was unwelcome to both her parents at first ; but at last Mr Edwards’ good-nature triumphed over all difficulties. The carriage was to be sent, and Sam invited to escort his sister. “ He must get on to Guildford as best he can,” added Mr Edwards.

So it happened that on Saturday morning, Elizabeth received a despatch which gladdened her heart, and Sam one which gladdened and disturbed his. Emma was also disturbed on finding that she could be so ungrateful. She was pleased, because Elizabeth was glad, but the world was a very dull place, and she anticipated very little pleasure in removing to another part of it. She brightened when she understood that Sam was to escort her ; he was invariably kind, and there had been but few opportunities of seeing him ; for Mrs Robert was resolved on patronage, and he resolved that it should not be so. Easter Sunday came and went, and on Monday morning Sam and the carriage were at the

door. Elizabeth's regrets at the parting with her sister, and being left behind, were overborne by the knowledge of the benefit and ease which would be Emma's. Mrs Robert was divided between relief at being quit of an invalid, and annoyance on seeing Emma depart in so important a style.

It was very pleasant to Emma to drive out of Croydon. A lengthy period of waiting on and appeasing a spoilt child, without change of scene or company, followed by days when she was confined to her room, when Mrs Robert's habit of finding fault had given place to a general air of dissatisfaction towards the invalid, had left her in a state of mind very ready to be pleased. Each turn of the road and changing view, each remark made by Sam, was a small adventure. Emma's sympathy soon called forth Sam's confidence, and what would a lover confide but his affection? Emma gave her brother every encouragement at first, and then, calling to mind the officers surrounding Miss Edwards at the ball, and the ten thousand pounds which was said to be her fortune, felt bound to recommend caution in the entertainment of his hopes.

"But Emma," he protested, "if I am not to hope, what is the good of it all? I have always loved her, and she only met Captain Hunter last winter."

Emma warned him that he must not rely too much on his position as an old friend.

"I do not see why. Just observe this. At Guildford it is Mr Curtis they have faith in. They argue with me: they say—'Mr *Curtis* always

recommended this or that'—just because he is the old apothecary, they believe in him and trust him. Now why should it be different at D——? Why should not Mary Edwards trust me? I would trust her with the whole world."

"I fear, Sam, that ladies do not always marry those in whom they have most confidence."

This called forth a great sigh from Sam.

"Then she will marry a red-coat; they have nothing to do but wait on her, and make fine speeches."

Emma found herself again giving encouragement, which again must be discounted, when he began to make plans for a happy future.

With so much to talk of, the hours passed rapidly, and almost before they had begun to wish for the end of the journey, the carriage drew up at the door of Mrs Edwards' house.

There occurred a short delay, as Emma found that she needed Sam's support to mount the steps to the door, where she was taken in hand by Mrs Edwards and her daughter, the former saying to Sam with some severity:

"I trust you have been careful of Miss Emma."

Whether Mrs Edwards regretted these words, or whether it was simply Sam's smile, can only be conjectured, but when they all met again in the parlour, Mrs Edwards' first words were:

"It will be too far for you to walk to Guildford so late in the day, Mr Samuel. It were better for you to sleep here; Mr Edwards will give you a letter of explanation to Mr Curtis."

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Mr Edwards came in after his accustomed stroll in the town, he brought with him another gentleman. Mr Ackroyd, the D—— apothecary, was a small elderly person, a general favourite with his patients, despite a considerable independence of mind and habit. After suitable greetings had been exchanged, and solicitous enquiries made of Emma by Mr Edwards, he remarked :

“ Our friend here has been turned out of his house, so I told him that I thought Mrs Edwards would provide an extra knife and fork here.”

“ That will indeed be a pleasure,” replied she, “ but you cannot make me believe the Rector would turn Mr Ackroyd out of his house even with six month’s warning, still less with no warning at all.”

Mr Ackroyd chuckled.

“ All must fear the apothecary, eh ! Mr Samuel ? They know the time must come when we mix them a draught.”

“ You gentlemen are always making fun,” put in Mrs Edwards. “ But there is a spare bed for an old friend here, as quick as a knife and fork.”

“ Thank you, Mrs Edwards, thank you, but I believe I may be permitted to sleep in my own bed. It is only at dinner-time that I am better away. The kitchen is full of smoke, and my good house-

keeper does not like it, and when the chimney misbehaves she does not like me.”

At dinner Sam, seated between Mrs and Miss Edwards, found himself conversing with the elder lady, but comforted by the proximity of the younger. Mrs Edwards engaged in an animated discussion with Mr Samuel, and advocated the use of poultices in preference to the giving of physic. Mr Ackroyd, when applied to, would give no opinion beyond “The sick man is a poor helpless fellow; give it to him inside and outside, and he will gain a healthy desire to be up and well.”

Dessert was enjoyed by the fireside, and in cracking nuts and peeling apples all were becoming more intimate, when a servant brought in a message for Mr Ackroyd.

“Lady Osborne’s hand was paining her again, and would Mr Ackroyd please to wait on her?”

Mr Ackroyd kept his seat. He seemed more disposed to think than to do.

“It’s just gout,” he said. “She will not have it that it is gout, but I should know.” He held up his hand, “I have it myself.”

“Does her ladyship suffer much?” inquired Miss Edwards.

“Gout is not pleasant, my dear, but at present I think more of the unpleasantness of leaving this very pleasant party, and the fire, and my first and second glass of port wine.”

The apothecary stirred, and laid his hands on the arms of his chair in preparation, but did not rise.

“Who said second thoughts are best?” he asked.

"Here is Mr Samuel Watson, a young surgeon, with all the latest learning in his head. I have a cold, and feel it growing worse. I beseech you, Mr Samuel, to wait on Lady Osborne in my stead, and do not fail to mention my cold."

Sam was naturally obliging, and Mary Edwards gave him an encouraging smile. He went for his greatcoat, and Mr Ackroyd's horse, as if a cold ride on a wet night were exactly what he most enjoyed.

When a young man has quitted the fire, and gone out to meet a cold wind, the older men and the ladies may draw their chairs a little nearer.

Mr Ackroyd was the first to speak.

"A bad, cold wind," he remarked, and held out his hands to feel the fire.

Mrs Edwards comforted them all with :

"Gentlemen, that is, many gentlemen, are accustomed to cold and wet, and do not find it so very unpleasant."

Emma encouraged them further with :

"Sam has a good greatcoat."

Mrs Edwards added that it could not be like a real, cold, winter wind.

Mr Edwards sipped his wine.

"When I was a young man," he said, "I thought no more of hardships than of eating my dinner." His glance swept the half-circle, met his wife's eye, and returned to the fire. She took up the challenge.

"You could always eat your dinner, Mr Edwards, but I am sure I do not know what the hardships may have been. They must all have happened before

you married, to my thinking." Mr Edwards retorted with :

"The day will come when Mr Samuel will be a married man too."

"Getting married will not enable a young surgeon to stay with his wife by the fire. He will need to be out all the more to support her." There was a slight pause. Perhaps Mr and Mrs Edwards felt their repartee was getting them near to subjects better not discussed. They were grateful for Emma's remark.

"My brother is, I am sure, always ready and willing for his work."

"True enough, Miss Emma," said Mr Ackroyd with warmth. "He has a good hand and head to my knowledge, and a good heart too, I will be bound." Emma, touched by the commendation of one she held so dear, replied with a happy glow.

"Thank you, sir, I can only answer for his being an excellent brother."

The ladies now withdrew to the best parlour, where they employed themselves in happy informality with their needlework, until joined by the gentlemen, who appeared quite content to watch and do nothing. Tea came up, and was followed a few minutes later by Sam, returned from his ride. There followed a delightful half-hour for him, and for Emma on his behalf. Mr Samuel must come close to the fire, the cook must toast another muffin for Mr Samuel, and he must relate in detail how he had fared. Some little encouragement was needed to make Sam talk, but all were ready to give it, and

the whole story of his visit was narrated from the first words with a lofty manservant, to the last words from a very affable Lady Osborne.

Sam's tale being complete, Mrs Edwards returned to her solicitude for Emma.

"I am convinced that sleep is what you most require. Do you not agree with me, Mr Ackroyd?"

"Indeed I do, Ma'am," he replied. "Sleep is good for the young, and I recommend plenty of sleep for the old, and in middle life. I always took a full allowance myself, when I got the chance."

Miss Edwards *would* go up with Emma to see her settled, and Mrs Edwards decided to go with them, letting it be known that she must not be expected downstairs again; which led to a not unfriendly difference with her husband, Mr Edwards contending that some ladies took any occasion to retire as soon after nine as might be, and Mrs Edwards asserting that gentlemen stayed downstairs to talk scandal, and drink more port wine than was good for them.

If the early retirement of the ladies was something of a disappointment to Sam, he had still many kind looks and words to remember. Before long he was giving his arm to Mr Ackroyd on his way home, and on his return found Mr Edwards yawning and prepared to falsify his wife's words.

When Emma rose next morning, Sam was already away, sped by what kind glances she could only surmise.

She kept the house, and the short day passed

pleasantly. Sam's prospects were much in her thoughts. The attendance at the Castle could at least do him no disservice, but she reflected that were she mistress there, it would be in her power to do much for his advancement. As to Mary Edwards, she could form no opinion. Miss Edwards was certainly friendly, and Emma had noticed certain exchange of glances, but it had to be admitted that Mr and Mrs Edwards looked for something more important.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE day following proved fine, and, on being applied to, Mrs Edwards sanctioned a short walk for Emma in the sunshine.

“We will go to Mr Brown’s,” said Mary, “and choose two books. I know you are a great reader.”

Mary, had no household duties to occupy her time, and not much gaiety ; her father and mother were active, and fully engaged in their own pursuits ; she had, moreover, attended an excellent school. Her mind was therefore both open and at leisure, and she had occupied much of her time in reading. Emma found they had read many of the same books, and with similar feelings, and they now interchanged opinions with a happy unanimity which was particularly soothing to Emma, whose mind had been starved by the inanities and wearied by the stupidities of the household at Croydon.

They had gone some little distance down the street, when Emma noticed Mr Howard approaching, but on the opposite pavement. He paused, raised his hat, and seemed to meditate crossing the street, and Emma was preparing to greet him as if unaware of his neglect, when Mr Ackroyd emerged from a shop behind them, and claimed their immediate attention. Emma, glancing round, saw only Mr Howard’s back, and that he walked very fast.

The double encounter interrupted the conversation of the two young ladies, and they reached the stationer's in silence. Books were selected, and a further two minutes' walk took them past Mr Tomlinson's and out into the country.

"*We* all like Mr Howard. He is usually very civil, though I confess to you that I find his talk a little high and dry," remarked Mary.

Emma replied that Mr Howard had, in her opinion many good qualities, and that he could certainly be very pleasant on occasions.

Mary was silent, whilst Emma paused at a gate to admire the prospect, and then said with hesitation :

"I trust I run no risk of paining you ; those who have been sickly should never be plagued, but I have heard it said that you treated Mr Howard ill."

"I treat Mr Howard ill !" was all the rejoinder, "I treat Mr Howard ill ?"

Mary took fright.

"Now you will be made ill again. I will not say another word. I was wrong to talk so at all."

This was more than Emma could bear.

"Having repeated to me part of what has been said, you will best relieve my mind by telling me the whole."

Mary was very willing to continue the subject, though fearful of some ill effects, but the wishes proved stronger than the fears.

"It was said that Mr Howard paid you much attention and,—but you must not force me to repeat all that was said. I do not believe it to be

at all true ; you would not behave so ; you are so different from—you would not be unfeeling.”

Emma was agitated, and anxious, and growing desperate. She stood still, faced Mary, and said :

“ I shall stand here until you tell me the whole, and I think it is turning a little cold.”

Thus encouraged, Mary proceeded.

“ They said that Lord Osborne would not speak to any one but you at the ball at the Castle—and they said, too, that you were jealous of Lady Osborne.”

Emma interrupted.

“ I am not in the least partial to Lord Osborne, but, if I were, I should not wish him to be less dutiful.”

“ That was not how it went,” continued Mary. “ You were angry because Mr Howard—that is you were said to be angry because Mr Howard must always sit by her—by Lady Osborne’s side.”

Emma essayed to understand what was implied by this gossip, but found that this was not possible while Mary Edwards waited some reply. It must all be thought over in the quiet of her own chamber, and she therefore remarked :

“ My dear Mary, you confuse me, and I hardly follow it all ; but I certainly have not treated Mr Howard ill.” Gaining confidence, she proceeded, “ I may rightly claim to have treated him with consistent civility ; on his side the attention has not been so equal. Should we not return ? Mrs Edwards was very strict about our return.”

The conversation was now on indifferent subjects,

and Miss Edwards was divided between relief that her friend was not taken ill, and the wish that this very interesting subject might be further canvassed.

On gaining the house Emma expressed a wish to rearrange her attire, and on reaching her apartment sat down to think. Her thoughts were confused, but by no means disagreeable. Was Mr Howard's interest in her so noticeable that it was freely commented on? Was Mr Howard among those who had observed Lord Osborne's partiality? Was Lady Osborne among those who had noted the attentions Mr Howard had paid her? Had mother and son combined to instil into Mr Howard's mind doubts and fears, possibly even dislike for herself? She could not imagine Lady Osborne in any sort of combined action with her son. She could not imagine Mr Howard's mind influenced by any one against herself, though she could not but see that he might easily be discouraged from action of any kind. What should be her behaviour? In what way could she best hope to convince Mr Howard that she had not been, and never could be, guilty of treating him ill?

There was a knock at the door, and a servant brought enquiries from Mrs Edwards, with a recommendation that Miss Watson do not risk getting a chill.

While hurriedly completing her toilet, Emma resolved to continue meeting this puzzling Mr Howard with reasonable cordiality, and to do what might be done to make clear any misunderstanding.

The wind on the two days that followed blew

from the east, and there was no mention of taking the air. Emma's spirits were not equal, but by no means consistently poor. Mrs Edwards and her daughter lacked something of animation, but Mr Edwards' regular appearance brought a stir and some degree of diversion. The second day was to be preferred to the first, as it brought a letter from Elizabeth which, after enquiries and assurances, made mention of one of the customary card-parties the night before. Emma was glad to note that Elizabeth had without doubt been diverted beyond the ordinary.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CALM bright day followed the forty-eight hours of wind. Breakfast being finished, events followed as usual. Mr Edwards sat for some fifteen minutes, during the last five of which he showed increasing signs of uneasiness. He then discovered that some matter of importance required his attention down the street, and added that he must be off without loss of time. Having neither business nor hobby, he had nothing to do all day, and was always busy in the doing of it till dinner-time. Mrs Edwards had long since given up any attempt to induce him to call at the milliners, or to stop and say a word to the butcher.

After his departure, the course of events might vary. To-day Mrs Edwards decided for the store-room. Then there arose a slight difficulty. Mary Edwards was anxious to visit a poor family, in whom she was interested, and Mrs Edwards would not hear of Emma's going to a low part of the town.

It was finally settled that the two girls should walk together as far as the end of Market-hall Street, and that Emma should there await the other's return and remain in the sunshine. She had viewed two shop windows, and had half-turned to proceed up the street to a third, when she came face to face with Mr Howard. The gentleman spoke first.

"I trust that you are better, Miss Watson. It was only yesterday that I learned of your having been unwell."

Emma replied that their home was at such a distance as to render it unlikely that he would hear any account of them. Mr Howard looked surprised.

"My sister told me that you were gone to *visit* your brother at Croydon."

Emma rejoined :

"No, it was not such a visit as grows by accident or design into something more permanent. It was settled from our going that we make our home with my brother and sister."

"It is perhaps permissible," he replied, "to speak of a place of residence as a home, provided there is at the time no other place of abode."

They paced a short distance in silence. Then Emma spoke again.

"Mr Howard, you appear to have a strange disbelief in our being resident at Croydon."

Mr Howard replied with hesitation.

"I do not know as to your sisters, but surely your own residence there will be brief. Forgive me if I presume on our former happy acquaintance. I certainly have prepared myself to hear of you shortly as being engaged to Lord Osborne."

"May I ask, sir, why you should expect to hear anything of the sort?" asked Emma, with a show of gentle indignation, which might have reassured him that his expectations were not to be realized,—but Mr Howard had the idea of misery too firmly fixed to be thus lightly dismissed.

“I know that Lord Osborne intended to make you an offer, and I surmise, nay, I feel assured that he has made it, but your father’s death and your own removal——”

Emma interrupted him.

“Mr Howard, does Lord Osborne’s offer end the whole matter?”

“It would then rest with you to accept, or decline.”

“So you say, sir, but so you do not think. You consider Lord Osborne’s offer so tempting, that I must be ready to forego all other advantages.”

Again there was a pause, and then Mr Howard spoke, but with a note of unmistakable elation.

“It is true. I have thought too much of his rank and consequence; but that was not all. He has been my friend as well as my pupil. He is not clever, but it would be possible for a woman, even one endowed as you are with gifts of heart and mind, to have a real regard——”

Emma again interrupted.

“Very well, Mr Howard, shall I send a message to him through you to retract my refusal, and to beg him to renew the offer?”

Mr Howard looked at her. There was no hesitation in his voice or manner now.

“Emma,” he cried, “do you prefer me? I have not dared to hope, but——”

Emma’s reply was satisfactory, more satisfactory than the place in which it was given. Market-hall Street of the town of D—— is not a convenient place for the interchange of lovers’ vows, and Mr

Howard proposed that they should walk past the Tomlinson's house into the country.

Mary Edwards, returning at about the same time, saw nothing of them but their backs, and guessed that Emma had forgotten, not only their meeting, but her very existence. She was well able to fill in the gaps in the story, as she had heard it detailed by the gossips of the town, and returned to her mother to acquaint her with all that she had seen, and the greater part of what she had imagined.

Emma never returned to Croydon. Mrs Edwards insisted that, as the engagement had taken place from her house, so should the wedding. In the month of June, Emma and Mr Howard were married. Edward Howard's integrity and delicacy of feeling contributed no less than Emma's strength of mind and character to the success of the union.

The years of happy married life began with a wedding-day of quite uncommon contentment. Emma's mourning for her father prevented the ceremony from being made a public occasion, and as this suited the taste of all those most concerned, the disappointment of the gossips of D—— gave no one any distress. Sam rode over from Guildford, and made such good use of his opportunities, that a few months later he made the same journey to attend another wedding, that of Mary and himself, and to settle in D—— as Mr Ackroyd's successor.

Elizabeth came to Emma's wedding all delighted flutter, and gay violet ribands. Jane, however, was indisposed, and Robert and Margaret stayed at home with her. Margaret would have come,

despite Jane's disapproval, if she had had any hopes of meeting Tom Musgrave, but she knew enough of Emma and of Mrs Edwards to be sure that he would not be of the party.

The Parsonage to which Mr Howard had exchanged was commodious, and Emma's proposal that Mrs Blake should live with them till she could secure a suitable dwelling in the neighbourhood was accepted. It might reasonably have been expected that some old person would, in dying, make an empty house, or that some younger person would come by a fortune, and quit a suitable one, but nothing of the kind happened. The joint house-keeping proved a success; no such happy events occurred as would have made additional space necessary for the Howards themselves, and Charles, with his brothers and his sister grew up at the new Parsonage.

Emma's scheme that Elizabeth should come to live with her, though the kindness was warmly felt, could not be carried out. She had a secret to communicate to her beloved sister—no less than that she was after all to become Elizabeth Purvis. Mr Jasper Purvis, after Emma's departure from Croydon, had transferred his attentions with alacrity and good sense.

All these weddings were overshadowed by the alliance between Sir William Gordon and Miss Osborne, an event of great interest to many, more particularly to those who had the good fortune to have foretold, and the greater number who could only claim to have foreseen.

In the following year Penelope became a mother ; the child was said to be remarkably clever. At the time when his ability was manifested by a capacity to read words of more than one syllable Tom Musgrave was yet a bachelor, and it is to be supposed that there was hope for Margaret.

Mrs Jasper Purvis and Mrs Samuel Watson had the most wonderful and beautiful and charming children, and Emma was their beloved Aunt.

